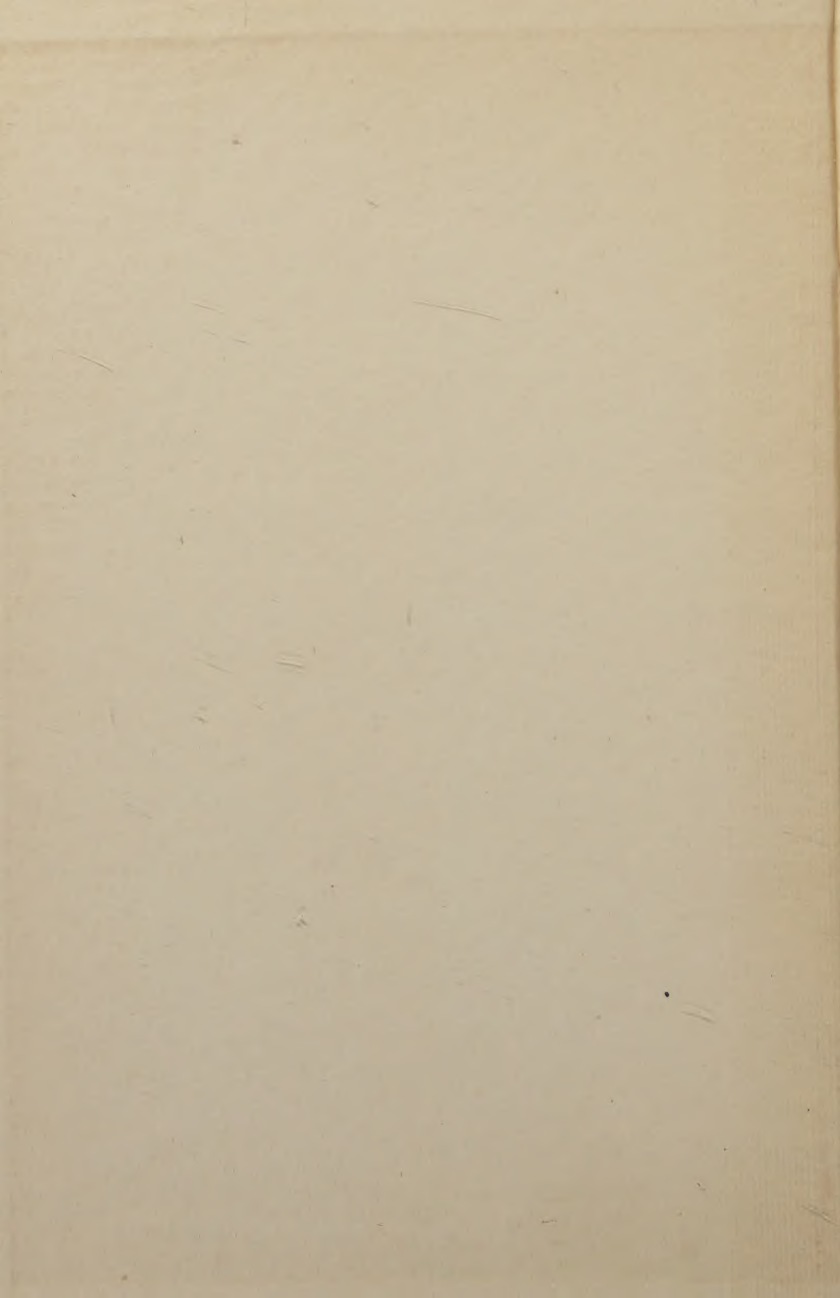


THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE TREASURE CAVE

By ROSS KAY





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BY
ROSS KAY

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the Battle Line," "The Air Scout," "The Go Ahead
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PREFACE

The love of adventure is inborn in all normal boys. Action is almost a supreme demand in the stories they read with most pleasure. Recognizing this primary demand, in this tale I have endeavored to keep in mind this requisite and at the same time to avoid sensational appeals. The unusual is not always the improbable. The Go Ahead Boys are striving to be active without being unduly precocious or preternaturally endowed.

ROSS KAY.

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THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE TREASURE CAVE

CHAPTER I

THE VOYAGE IS BEGUN

“**A**-A-LL ha-a-ands! Up anchor! A-ho-oy!”

Instantly all was bustle and action on board the brig *Josephine*. The sailors ran hither and thither, the sails were loosed and the yards braced. The clanking of the windlass soon told that the anchor was being raised.

“Whew! I never saw so much excitement and hurry in all my life,” exclaimed a boy, who with three companions stood on the deck of the brig and looked on at these activities without actually taking part in them themselves. The speaker was Fred Button. He was a tiny little fellow, known affectionately among his friends as Stub, or Peewee or Pygmy. This last name was frequently shortened into Pyg, much to Fred’s disgust, though he had learned better than to lose his temper because of teasing or little things that did

not just suit him. He had given up such foolishness long ago.

With his three companions he had embarked on the *Josephine* for a voyage to Buenos Aires in South America. The lure of the sea had attracted these four boys and the desire to see something of foreign lands had spurred them on. They were on board in the capacity of passengers though it was also their desire to help the crew in whatever way they were able.

Standing beside Fred Button was John Clemens, a boy who was as unusually tall as Fred was short. He was extremely thin, however, and with his six feet three inches of height he looked like a string, according to his friends. In fact that was what they usually called him.

Next to him was Grant Jones. Grant was about eighteen, the same age as the other three boys though he was their leader in a great many ways. No matter what he attempted he always did it well. In school work he usually led his class and on the athletic field he far outshone the others. His talents had won him the nickname of Socrates which, however, was usually shortened to Soc. "Old Soc Jones" was always a favorite.

The fourth member of the group was George Washington Sanders. He was always good natured and his witty remarks had made him intensely popular with all who knew him. In honor

of the name he bore he sometimes had been referred to as the father of his country, which appellation, however, had finally been corrupted to Pop.

"It certainly is busy around here, isn't it?" exclaimed Grant Jones in response to Fred Button's remarks previously referred to.

"And it's all mystery to me," added John Clemens. "These orders being shouted and the strange things the men are doing are getting me bewildered."

"I've been standing here expecting some one of the sailors to mistake you for a mast and hang a sail on you any minute, String," said Pop Sanders slyly, at the same time nudging Fred Button.

"Is that so?" exclaimed John Clemens quickly. "At any rate, I'd rather be the shape of a mast than a bag of ballast."

"That's the way, String," said Grant Jones encouragingly. "Don't let him get the better of you."

"He never has and he never will," said John complacently.

"Stop arguing," exclaimed Fred Button, "and tell me what kind of a boat this is that we are on."

"It's a sailing boat," said Pop Sanders. "Did you think it was a steamer?"

"I mean what kind of a sailing boat is it. Is it a schooner or a bark, or what?"

"It's a brig," said Socrates Jones. "You can

always tell a brig from the way she is rigged. She has two masts and is square rigged."

"I thought that was a brigantine," protested Fred.

"No," said Grant. "A brigantine is very much the same though. She has two masts and is square rigged on the foremast, but schooner rigged on the other."

"Which is called the mainmast," said Fred.

"Quite right," agreed Grant. "I'll make a sailor of you yet."

The *Josephine* was now sliding through the waters of New York Bay. The Statue of Liberty was just ahead on her right (or rather her star-board side) while on the port side was Governor's Island, with its old fort and parade ground plainly to be seen. Two big ocean liners loomed up a short distance away. One was just completing her voyage from Europe while the other was only starting. Saucy little tugs rushed hither and thither. Ferryboats passed, bearing their precious burdens of human freight. Great barges loaded to the water's edge were towed slowly along. Ahead could be seen many steamers lying at anchor in the lower bay off the quarantine station, while now and again a sailing vessel similar to the one on which the Go Ahead boys were embarked could also be seen. They were not very numerous, however.

“Well, what do you think of it, boys?” demanded a bluff, hearty voice behind them. It was Captain Roger Dodge, the commander of the *Josephine*, who spoke to them. His face was bronzed by the sun and wind and his drooping mustache was faded to a straw color. His gray eyes were the features that struck any one who observed him closely, however. A merry twinkle could be seen in them, but at the same time their expression denoted that their owner was a man who would never be afraid of anything on land or sea.

“We think it’s fine,” exclaimed Fred Button speaking for the others.

“It’s a wonderful harbor all right,” said Captain Dodge. “I think it’s just about the finest in the world and I’ve seen most of them too.”

“What one do you like next to this, captain?” inquired Grant. Old Soc Jones was always eager to learn something.

“Well,” said the captain slowly, “I guess the harbor at Sydney, Australia, next to this. Still San Francisco has a wonderful harbor, too. That golden gate out there is a sight worth seeing.”

“I wish I could see it,” said Grant, wistfully. “Some day I hope to do it, too. Still, there are so many wonderful places in the world it’s hard to say which ones you’d rather see first.”

“That’s very true,” agreed the captain. “I’ve seen a good many, but I always want to see more.

I've knocked around the world so long that I don't believe I could settle down and be happy now. I guess I've got the wanderlust all right."

"It's easy to get," exclaimed Pop Sanders, serious for once. "We've all got it ourselves."

"How long have you been a sailor, captain?" asked John Clemens.

"Thirty years. I started in as a cabin boy when I was fourteen years old and I've been at it ever since."

"You ought to know about all there is to know about it, I should think," said Fred.

"Without boasting at all, I can safely say that I do know a lot about the business," said Captain Dodge, smilingly. "I've done about all there is to do on a ship, I guess."

"And you've had some wonderful experiences," suggested Grant.

"Yes, I have," said the captain smilingly.

"Will you tell us about them sometime?"

"I should be glad to," said the captain readily. "Not now, though, for, as you can see, I am pretty busy," and the bluff sailor hurried away, shouting orders to his men, who all seemed to like him and take delight in carrying out his commands as quickly as possible.

"Captain Dodge isn't much like the sea captains we used to read about in the old story books, is he?" remarked Grant Jones.

"Why not?" demanded Pop Sanders. "He certainly looks like a sailor."

"I know that," agreed Grant, "but I meant the kind of a man the crew all hated and feared and who used to give them the rope's end every time they did anything he didn't like."

"That day has passed, I guess," laughed John Clemens. "Perhaps it's lucky for us, too, for we might get it ourselves."

"Any one would have to be a pretty good shot to hit you with anything, String," said Pop Sanders teasingly.

"Huh," snorted John, but he made no other reply.

At this moment Captain Dodge approached.

"We've got to anchor, boys," he said. "The wind is dead ahead of us here in the narrows and I think I'll wait till it shifts."

"We might all go to Coney Island then," exclaimed Fred Button eagerly.

"And the wind might change almost any minute and we'd sail off and leave you behind," laughed Captain Dodge. "Coney Island is just around that point, though, and you could row there in a little while."

"I guess we'll stay aboard if you're thinking of leaving us," said Fred. "I'd rather go to Buenos Aires than Coney Island."

"That's what I say," exclaimed John Clemens.

"Can't we do something to help around here?" asked Grant. "We're only amateur sailors, but we're anxious to do what we can."

"I know you are," said Captain Dodge. "I expect you to take your regular turns on watch with the rest of the crew. Just now I want the sails taken in, though. Do you suppose one of you could go up that foremast?"

"I could," cried Fred quickly. "Let me go."

"Think you can take in that topsail?"

"I can help."

"That's all I want, of course. There'll be a sailor up there with you to tell you what to do and perhaps you can be of assistance to him."

"I'd like to try it, anyway," said Fred eagerly.

"All right," said the captain. "Mr. Johnson," he called to the first mate, who was a big blonde-haired Swede, "this young man wants to go aloft. Will you let him help your man take in that fore-topsail?"

"Yes, sir," came the quick reply, and Fred ran to the foot of the mast, where Mr. Johnson, the mate, and a sailor named Petersen were standing.

"Follow me," said Petersen, and he began to climb. Up the rigging he went, with Fred close behind him. It was hard work for the inexperienced boy to keep pace with the hardy sailor, and he was well-nigh exhausted when at last they stood upon the yards.

"That's hard work," panted Fred.

"You'll get used to it," smiled the sailor.

"There's a knack about it."

"What do we do now?" demanded Fred.

"Wait till we get our orders. The captain will bring 'er up into the wind in a minute and that's when we get to work."

"What shall I do?"

"You grab all the loose sail you can, right in your arms, and try to hold it there. They'll let go below."

Fred felt dizzy, standing so high above the decks, and he clung to the ropes which were all about him, for dear life. He heartily wished that he was once more with his comrades, but it was too late now. He must go through with it, and he was determined, if possible, not to betray his nervousness.

"Stand by!" came the faint call from below.

"Hang on now," cautioned Petersen. "They're going to bring 'er 'round."

The steersman put the helm hard over and the *Josephine* swung rapidly around with her bow into the wind. In spite of the warning Fred did not hold on as tightly as he should. He felt himself slipping. He clutched madly at the maze of ropes which entirely surrounded him. He tried to call out, but no sound came. Desperately he strove to save himself, but his efforts were unavailing.

CHAPTER II

A PLUCKY FEAT

FRED'S three companions on the deck below watched their friend with horrified eyes. They had felt envious of his good fortune until now, and every one of them had wished that he was in Fred's place.

"It must be great up there," Grant exclaimed as he looked at Fred standing up against the topmast, far above the decks.

"That's the place to be, all right," said String enthusiastically.

"If you were up there it would look like two masts instead of one," said Pop Sanders.

"Say," said John in disgust. "You got off that same joke just a few minutes ago. It was all right the first time, but it's a pretty poor one now."

The three boys had stood below bantering one another and envying Fred until the *Josephine* came about and they saw that their comrade was dizzy and in danger of falling.

He swayed dangerously for a while that seemed a century long. He waved his arms wildly in the air and then clutched frantically for some rope or

brace to save himself. He seemed to grab hold of plenty of ropes but to hang on to none. Moreover, a rope was the cause of his fall, for one swung violently around and catching the unfortunate boy around the ankles tripped him up and pulled him from the precarious spot on which he stood.

He toppled backward and fell. His three companions with one accord uttered a groan of horror and shut their eyes to keep out the awful sight of what was about to happen. To think that their wonderful trip was to be spoiled at the very start in this way! They turned their backs to the scene, afraid to look. Every boy expected to hear a thud on the deck and see the mangled body of their companion at their feet.

To them it seemed as if they waited hours and yet they did not hear the expected sound. Instead of that they heard a shout.

“Hold him!” some one cried, and opening their eyes and daring to look about them, the three boys on the deck saw something that was as unexpected as it was welcome.

Fred hung head downward from the yard, a rope twisted tightly around his feet. The same rope that had thrown him from his position was now holding him suspended in the air. But how securely did it hold him? Could it support him until help could come? That was the question.

"Go to him, somebody!" cried Grant in an agonized voice. Even as he spoke a sailor ran swiftly along the deck to the base of the foremast and began to climb rapidly. To those who watched him, however, it seemed as if he progressed at a snail's pace.

"He's going to drop!" groaned String.

"Maybe not," said Pop Sanders, trying to appear cheerful.

"What can he do if he does reach him?" demanded Grant.

"Wait and see," cautioned Pop.

Higher and higher climbed the sailor. From above Petersen, the man who had accompanied Fred to the top, leaned down and took hold of the rope which was all that kept the unfortunate boy from falling.

"Don't pull on that," begged Grant. "It'll surely come loose."

The sailor had now approached within a few feet of Fred. A moment later and he was by his side. He made no move to help the boy who hung so perilously out into space. Instead he shouted something to Petersen which could not be heard on the deck below.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Pop angrily. "Why doesn't he do something?"

"Let him alone," cautioned Grant. "I guess he knows his business."

“But Fred’ll fall.”

“I guess not. That sailor can see how firm a hold that rope has on his ankles. He won’t take any chances.”

“He called for a rope,” exclaimed John Clemens. “See, that sailor who went up with Fred is letting one down.”

“And he’s making the other one fast to the yard,” added Grant.

“They’re going to haul him up, I guess,” said Pop.

“That’s right,” exclaimed Grant. “See, he’s tying the other end around Fred’s chest. They’ll have him fixed all right in a minute.”

“If he doesn’t fall before,” String reminded them.

“You’re certainly a pessimist, String,” exclaimed Pop. “Don’t you ever have a cheerful thought?”

“Of course I do, but I’m worried.”

“So am I. I try to be cheerful now and then, though.”

“He’s all right now,” exclaimed Grant as the sailor finished tying the rope around Fred’s body. “He couldn’t fall now to save his life.”

The sailor scrambled quickly up the mast until he stood alongside Petersen. Then the two men bent low, and hauling in hand over hand, soon pulled Fred up to the yard on which they stood.

They did not untie the rope from around his waist, however, but rather made the loose end of it fast around the mast so that the accident could not be repeated. A great cheer from those who had assembled below greeted the result of this work.

"I guess Fred's awfully dizzy just now," remarked Grant. "I don't believe it's much fun hanging by your heels way up there."

"And now how are they going to get him down?" demanded Pop. "He certainly can't do it by himself. He'd be sure to fall."

At this moment Captain Dodge joined the three boys. "A pretty close call for our sailor friend," he remarked grimly.

"Yes," agreed Grant, "it certainly was. I don't suppose he'll want to do much climbing for quite a while now."

"I hope not," said the captain heartily.

"How are you going to get him down?" asked Pop.

"That's easy," said the captain, smiling. "We'll take a very long rope, one that will reach all the way from the deck up to where he is and back again. We'll tie one end around your friend and we'll hang on to the other down here on the deck. The rope will go over the yard and he will be on one end and we will be on the other. Then we'll lower away slowly and the first thing you know he'll be right down here with us again."

"And mighty glad to get here, I guess," exclaimed Grant.

"I'll send a man up with the rope now," said the captain, and he started to walk away.

"Wait," cried Grant suddenly. "What's Fred trying to do?"

"He's untying the ropes," exclaimed String. "Is he crazy?"

"I guess he is," said Pop. "It looks as if he was getting ready to climb down the way he went up."

"Yell at him," exclaimed String excitedly.

"Don't you do it," cautioned Captain Dodge quickly. "Don't distract his attention from what he is doing for a second. It's too late now, anyway."

Fred now stood free and clear of the ropes. It was evident that the two men with him were arguing with him not to attempt the descent, but apparently their efforts made no impression on the daring youth, for he could be seen to shake his head. Then he gingerly lowered himself from the yard and began the perilous journey to the deck.

"Pretty nervy," muttered Captain Dodge under his breath, and murmurs of admiration could be heard from all the members of the crew gathered nearby. No one spoke, however, for all eyes and all interest were focused on the feat Fred was performing.

Slowly and carefully he proceeded at first, but as he gained in confidence he increased the speed of his descent. Before he had covered half of the distance he was swinging along as freely and apparently as carelessly as any sailor. A moment later and he reached the deck.

"Good boy," cried Captain Dodge, springing forward to shake hands with Fred, and at the same time a hearty cheer was given by the crew.

As soon as Fred touched foot on the deck, however, a change came over him. His face became deathly pale and he swayed dizzily. He put out his hand to save himself, but before Captain Dodge could reach him he collapsed and sank to the deck in a limp heap.

"Fainted," remarked Grant simply.

"Well, I don't blame him," exclaimed Pop Sanders. "It's the reaction from the strain probably."

The three boys rushed to the side of their comrade and found that Grant's surmise had been correct. Fred had fainted.

"Bring some water," directed Captain Dodge. "He'll be around presently."

Fred soon opened his eyes after a few treatments of cold water, splashed directly in his face. He looked about him and smiled weakly.

"How do you feel?" asked Captain Dodge.

"Fine," said Fred, but he didn't look so.

"You better get in your bunk for a while," said the captain. "That's all you need just now. I'll tell the cook to bring you a little hot soup."

Leaning on Grant and George Washington Sanders, Fred made his way below. He was very weak after his ordeal and it was with a great sigh of relief that he sank into his bunk.

"What made you climb down?" demanded Pop.

"Well," said Fred, "I just had to. I knew that if I didn't do it then I never would have the nerve to try again. I felt so foolish to have caused all the trouble I did and I knew they'd all think me an awful landlubber. I felt as if I ought to square myself."

"You did that all right," said Grant heartily. "The whole crew is crazy about you now, and String and Pop and I are certainly in the shade."

"I don't mind that part of it," said Pop. "All I say is, don't do it again. I couldn't stand another ten minutes like those."

"And I tell you one thing," said Grant. "It's lucky for you that the *Josephine* had been brought up into the wind. If we had been tacking or beating or something like that you'd never had hung so quietly as you did."

"Are we anchored now?" asked Fred.

"Yes," said Grant. "We're going to stay here until the wind changes."

"When do you suppose that will be?"

“The captain says it’ll probably swing around to the west to-night. As soon as it does we will get under way again.”

“They can’t do it too soon to suit me,” exclaimed String. “I want to be out on the ocean, where you can’t see a bit of land in any direction.”

“That’ll happen soon enough, once we get started,” said Grant. “Then we’ll probably wish we were on shore again.”

At this moment the cook appeared with a bowl of smoking hot soup for Fred. The cook was named Sam and was as black as ebony.

“Wh’ars dat high diver?” he demanded as he entered the cabin.

“You mean me?” smiled Fred.

“I sho’ do,” said Sam. “You suttinly is some acrobat.”

“Not again, I hope,” said Fred fervently. “I hope my troubles are over.”

As a matter of fact his troubles and his companions’ had scarcely begun.

CHAPTER III

A SUPERSTITIOUS COOK

“**A**H’S afraid ob dis heah boat,” said Sam as he handed the soup to Fred and settled himself on the side of the bunk opposite.

“Afraid of it?” exclaimed Fred. “Why?”

“She’s got de hoodoo,” said Sam decidedly.

“Why, Sam,” said Fred. “What do you mean by that?”

“She’s got de hoodoo, dat’s all.”

“What makes you think so?”

“Because Ah feels dat way.”

“But why do you feel that way?”

“Dey’s a Jonah on board.”

“You think so?”

“Ah sho’ do,” said Sam, nodding his ebony head violently up and down. “Ah seen him come abo’d and Ah knowed right away dat we was gwine ter hab hard luck dis cruise.”

“You know who the Jonah is, then, do you?” inquired Grant, somewhat amused by the black man’s superstitions.

“Ah done tol’ you all Ah seen him come abo’d,” said Sam.

"Who is he?"

"Dat Finn."

"What Finn?" demanded Fred. "What is his name?"

"Ah doan' know his name, but he am de Jonah all right."

"What does he look like?" asked Fred.

"Like all de Finns," said Sam. "Big, wid light hair."

"You don't mean Mr. Johnson, the mate, do you?" said Grant.

"Suttinly not. Mr. Johnson am a Swede."

"Who can it be, do you suppose?" asked Grant of Fred and String and Pop. The four friends were much interested in what Sam had to say.

"Dey calls him Pete," said Sam.

"Not Petersen?" exclaimed Fred. "The man who went up the mast with me?"

"Dat's de one," said Sam with great conviction. "He am a Jonah. Jus' so long as he is on dis boat we is boun' to hab hard luck. He was de one who was responsible fo' you all doin' dat dive."

"How silly," laughed Fred. "You don't think he pushed me, do you?"

"Ah ain't sayin' as how he done actually pushed you," said Sam mysteriously. "All de same he was 'sponsible."

"Why do you suspect him, Sam?" asked String curiously.

“Because he am a Finn,” said Sam.

“Is that the only reason?”

“Ain’t dat enuff?” exclaimed Sam. “He’s a Finn, ain’t he? Well, doan’ you all know dat Finns is hard luck?”

“I never knew it,” said Fred.

“Well it’s de truth jus’ de same,” said Sam.

“Why is that?” asked Fred.

“Ah doan’ know nothin’ about why it is,” said Sam. “All Ah knows is dat Finns is hard luck on boats an’ always has been.”

“What can they do?”

“Dey say,” whispered Sam in a low voice and leaning forward after a glance around the cabin, “dat dey can make de wind blow or dey can make it stop blowin’. Dey can make de storms come and if dey tries real hard dey can wreck de whole ship.”

“By doing what?” asked Grant.

“By doin’ nothin’,” replied Sam confidently. “Dey jus’ sits in de cabin and thinks and thinks and wha’soever dey thinks about is boun’ to happen.”

“It wouldn’t do to get one of them mad at you then, would it?” remarked Pop.

“Ah should say not,” exclaimed Sam with great conviction.

“Haven’t you ever sailed with Finns before?” asked Grant.

"Once, an' dat time we had nothin' but head winds an' calms all de blessed time. Dat proves what Ah say about dem Finns, doan' it?"

"You think the Finn was responsible, do you?"

"Ah is sho' of it."

"We'll hope you're wrong, Sam," laughed Pop. "Certainly we're not looking for hard luck. We're out for fun."

"Ah hopes yo' all has it," said Sam, but he shook his head doubtfully and muttered to himself as he took the empty soup bowl from Fred's hands and carried it off into the galley.

"He's a queer one," said Pop laughing as he watched the cook's disappearing figure. "Imagine accusing all Finns of being hard luck."

"It's pretty tough on the race, I should say," said String.

"Yes," laughed Pop, "and just imagine what would happen if we were over in Finland. There certainly must be a lot of hard luck there."

"Oh, Sam doesn't know any better," said Grant. "He's ignorant and like all darkies is superstitious. Sailors are too, and as Sam is a combination of both he is worse than usual."

"He's made me feel sort of queer though," said Fred. "Of course it's silly and I suppose it's partly because I'm nervous after fainting but I feel as if something was hanging over us."

"Don't be foolish, Fred," exclaimed Grant.

"I'll get over it all right," said Fred lightly. "At the same time Sam's talk has gotten me stirred up some."

"Forget it," urged Pop briefly. "Come on up on deck and see what's going on."

"I think I'll stay here in my bunk a little while," said Fred. "I haven't quite recovered my nerve yet. You fellows go on up."

"All right," said Grant. "We'll see you later."

They made their way up on deck and found that the *Josephine* was still at anchor and that the wind instead of changing was blowing in the same direction and seemed fresher than formerly.

"The Finn's giving us head winds," said Pop in a low voice to his companions.

"There's Petersen over there now," remarked String. "He certainly looks harmless enough."

"And I guess he is," added Grant.

"Fred isn't sure of it any more."

"He'll feel differently about it when he has recovered from the shock he had," said Grant confidently.

"Perhaps," String admitted doubtfully. "Fred gets queer notions though."

"Let's ask Captain Dodge about it," exclaimed Grant. "There he is now."

"How's the patient?" asked the captain cheerily as the boys approached.

"All right," said Grant. "He finished all the soup that Sam brought him, I noticed. We were talking to Sam down in the cabin and he has gotten Fred excited."

"What about?" demanded the captain curiously.

"He says there is a Jonah on board and that we're going to have hard luck all through the voyage."

"Sounds just like Sam," laughed the captain. "Who did he say the Jonah is?"

"Petersen, the man who went up the mast with Fred."

"Because he's a Finn?" asked Captain Dodge.

"Yes," said Grant. "What's the matter with Finns anyway?"

"Why," said Captain Dodge, "there's an old superstition among sailors that they bring bad luck. I had almost forgotten it, but as soon as you said that Sam suspected Petersen I remembered that he is a Finn and that Sam would probably believe in the old story."

"I hope it's not true," said John Clemens.

"I guess we needn't worry about it," said the captain, smiling. "It doesn't bother me any but if you boys want to go ashore it isn't too late yet."

"We don't feel as bad about it as that," laughed Grant. "I guess we'll risk it."

"I'm all right anyway," exclaimed Pop Sanders. "I've got my compass."

“What do you think of him, captain?” exclaimed John. “He always carries a compass on a string around his neck.”

“That’s all right,” said Captain Dodge. “In case he is shipwrecked he can tell in which direction he is going anyway. Not that that knowledge would do him very much good.”

“And my diary,” added Pop. “Don’t forget that. I always carry a diary in my hip pocket with a little pencil in it so that I can jot things down just as soon as they happen or rather when I think to do it. You see when you have it with you you are more apt to keep it up to date.”

“A good idea,” said the captain warmly. “I see that you are a very methodical young man and probably I shall get you to keep the log for me.”

“I guess you wouldn’t want me to do that,” laughed Pop. “I’m afraid it wouldn’t be done very well.”

All day long the boys lolled about on the deck. Fred had joined his companions and the four friends discussed what they should do when they arrived at Buenos Aires, the beautiful South American city of which they had heard so much. They talked of a sailor’s life and all its hardships and its pleasures. Like everything else it is a mixture of good and bad and too much of either is harmful anyway.

After supper that evening the wind died down.

The water became almost as quiet as a mill pond and more than one of the four friends whispered to his comrades that the Finn was at the bottom of it all. George Sanders mentioned this to Captain Dodge in a joking way but the captain only laughed and said, "Wait. Unless I am very much mistaken we'll have a fine favoring wind inside of two hours."

His prophecy was soon fulfilled too, for in a short time a damp night-breeze sprang up out of the west. Up came the anchor, the sails were set, and the *Josephine* slid ghost-like down through the narrows, around Sandy Hook and out into the open sea.

"We're off, String," exclaimed George Sanders joyously. The two boys were standing near the forward hatchway looking out across the black water. If Pop had known what awaited them perhaps he would not have been quite so light hearted.

CHAPTER IV

A CODE

THE breeze held strongly and the *Josephine* made splendid progress. The life on ship-board had endless attractions for the four young boys. They learned the parts of the ship, the names of the sails and how to navigate. Sailors taught them to splice ropes and how to tie the hundred and one knots familiar to those who follow the sea. The weather was ideal and as everything went well, all on board were in excellent spirits.

“I guess Sam was wrong about this hard luck business,” remarked John Clemens one day to Grant Jones. The two boys were standing near the bow of the brig, watching two of Mother Carey’s chickens, those friendly little birds that follow and play around boats even out in the middle of the ocean.

“It certainly looks so, String,” said Grant. “We can’t hold much against the Finn so far, can we?”

“I should say not. Let’s hope it keeps up.”

“I don’t see how it can,” said Grant. “So far

it has been almost too good to be true, and I don't see how it can last."

"I think it will though."

"Sam says not. He says that maybe we have escaped so far but he still insists we're going to have something happen to us before we're through."

"He's cheerful, isn't he?" laughed John. "I'm not worrying though."

"Mr. Johnson says that we're almost bound to strike bad weather when we get into the gulf-stream."

"Why's that?"

"I don't know except for what he said. He says that sometimes you can see the low banks of clouds over the gulf-stream and that you may run from a clear sky and light wind, with all sail, into a heavy sea and cloudy sky where you'll need double reefs."

"Isn't that queer," exclaimed John. "I wonder when we'll reach it."

"Fairly soon, I should say," said Grant. "We must be getting pretty far south by now."

"We are. Captain Dodge told me we'd be in the West Indies before long."

"I wish we could stop."

"You want to see everything," laughed John. "We're going to South America, aren't we? What more do you want?"

At that moment Fred and George Sanders approached the two boys.

"We ought to be Sons of Neptune in a few days," exclaimed George gayly as he and Fred came up to the place where their two friends were standing.

"What do you mean by that, Pop?" asked John curiously.

"Just what I say, String, my boy," said George. "You don't mean to tell me that you don't know what a Son of Neptune is? Every man that sails any of the seven seas ought to know that."

"Don't be funny, Pop," warned John, assuming a threatening attitude. "Tell me what it means and be quick about it."

"You swear you don't know?"

"You heard what I said, didn't you?"

"Yes," grinned Pop, "but you know I don't believe half what you say."

"Throw him overboard, String," urged Fred. "Don't fool with him any longer."

"That's just about what I had decided to do," said John.

"Wait," cried Pop, stepping forward and holding up his hand dramatically. "Spare my life and I will tell all."

"Be quick about it then," warned John. "I shan't fool with you much longer."

"I know it," said Pop, pretending to be greatly

alarmed. "I know it, String, and I must say I am awfully frightened."

John stepped forward and raised his hands as if he was about to seize George W. Sanders by the neck. He had no opportunity to do so, however.

"I'll tell. I'll tell," cried Pop quickly.

"I'll give you till I count three," said John. "One, two—"

"A man becomes a Son of Neptune," said George, "when he has crossed the equator on a boat. Now will you promise not to hurt me? Not that you could do it if you tried," he added, but he muttered the words so softly to himself that no one else heard him.

"Is that what a Son of Neptune is?" exclaimed John.

"Yes, String, that's what a Son of Neptune is," said George, imitating as nearly as possible his friend's tone of voice.

"Who told you?" demanded Grant.

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Who told you?" repeated Grant sharply. "We'll have to take some of this freshness out of him pretty soon, String," he added.

"We surely will," agreed John readily. "I'm ready at any time."

The four friends loved to tease and banter one another and oftentimes an outsider might have thought from their conversation that they had lost

their tempers. Such, however, was never the case. They knew one another too well and all had too much sense for any such foolishness. In particular they all liked to tease and threaten Pop Sanders, though in any contest of wits he usually held his own and the threats of his comrades had no effect upon him whatever.

"For the third and last time, who told you?" demanded Grant.

"Petersen told me."

"You've been talking to the Finn, have you?" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes, and he's a nice fellow, too."

"Maybe you'll get his hard luck away from him," laughed Grant.

"I guess he's had hard luck himself all right," said Pop seriously. "That doesn't mean he'll give it to others though."

"What hard luck has he had?" asked John.

"Well, his father died when he was a baby and he was left with a big family of children to be brought up by his mother. She had no money and of course had an awfully hard time of it. Two of his sisters died of scarlet fever, a younger brother was drowned and finally his mother got pneumonia and she died. I call that pretty tough luck myself."

"So do I," agreed Grant readily.

"If Sam heard all those things he'd surely say it

was because it was a family of Finns," said Fred. "He'd say they brought hard luck to one another."

"He probably would," laughed Pop. "Still I feel sorry for a fellow who has had all that trouble."

"What did his father do?" asked John.

"He was a bad character principally, I guess," said Pop. "He was also a sailor at times."

"You must have had quite a long talk with Petersen, Pop," said Grant. "How did he happen to get so confidential?"

"I don't know. We just got talking, that's all, and the first thing I knew he began to tell me the story of his life."

"His father left the family no money, I imagine," said Fred.

"Certainly not. He left debts. The only thing he left was a bad reputation and this thing which Petersen gave to me," and as he spoke Pop reached in his hip pocket and brought out what appeared to be a dirty piece of old paper, folded up.

"What's that?" demanded Grant quickly.

"I don't know," said George. "See for yourself."

He handed the object in question to Grant who straightway unfolded it and glanced at it eagerly.

"It's nothing but a lot of numbers," he exclaimed disappointedly.

"I know it," said George. "Just a lot of old

faded numbers written on a piece of parchment."

"What's it supposed to be?" asked John curiously.

"Petersen thinks it's some sort of a code. Maybe it is but I think myself it is nothing at all, and that it might as well be thrown overboard."

"What makes him think it's a code?" said Grant.

"Nothing much that I know of," replied Pop. "He said it was found sewed inside the lining of a coat his father used to have and so he thought it must be valuable. He said that the neighbors used to tell some kind of weird stories about his father having been connected with buried treasure or something like that, and he is sure this has something to do with it. Personally I think he is mistaken about it."

"If he thinks it so valuable why did he give it to you?" demanded Fred.

"He didn't really give it to me to keep. He wanted me to try and decipher the code and tell him what it says."

"Did you do it?" laughed John.

"No, you Son of Neptune," exclaimed George. "I did not. I offered to read the numbers to him, but he said he could do that much himself."

"Where's this treasure buried?" asked Fred.

"That's just what Petersen wants to find out,"

said Pop. "That certainly was an awfully smart question to ask, Fred."

"I thought he might know the island or whatever it is where the stuff is supposed to be buried, but not the exact location of the jewels on the island."

"How do you know it's jewels?"

"It always is, isn't it?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Pop. "For all we know Petersen may be playing a joke on us. We're all landlubbers of course and the crew might have decided to initiate us a little."

"Perhaps," agreed John. "The parchment looks old though."

"What are the numbers, Grant?" asked Fred. "Read them out."

"Twenty," began Grant when he was interrupted.

"Add 'em up, you fellows," laughed George. "The total tells how old Anne is."

"Let him read them, Pop," urged John. "Give him a chance."

"Twenty, one, eleven, five, one, three, fifteen, twenty-one, eighteen, nineteen, five." Grant paused. "That's a funny thing" he said. "Every number is distinctly separated from the next one. It certainly seems as if it must mean something."

"All right, I'll tell Petersen that you are going to solve the mystery, Socrates, my boy," laughed Pop. "Shall I?"

Before Grant could answer there was a shout. A few sharp orders were given and immediately everything on board the *Josephine* was bustle and hurry. The crew came rushing out on deck, and scattered hither and thither all over the brig in obedience to the orders that were being given so rapidly. An anxious look was on the faces of all the men.

CHAPTER V

A TROPICAL STORM

“**W**HAT’S all this?” exclaimed Grant, startled by the sudden change that had come over the boat.

The four boys looked about them in surprise, unable to account for the transformation. Petersen was forgotten; jewels and treasure were forgotten; even the strange code was forgotten and Grant absent-mindedly thrust it into his trouser’s pocket.

“What is it, do you suppose?” he exclaimed again.

“Look over there and you’ll see,” said Fred.

He pointed to the westward and as his three friends gazed in the direction he had indicated they soon saw the cause of all the commotion. Far off on the western horizon appeared a cloud. That in itself was no special reason for alarm, but it was a very peculiar looking cloud. It was grayish-black in color and shaped like a funnel. Long ragged strips had separated themselves from the main body and hung like long wisps from the sky.

“Do you think it’s a tornado?” exclaimed John, in a low voice.

"I don't know, String," said Pop. "It looks bad though, doesn't it?"

"It does to me all right," said Fred grimly. "The captain must think it is pretty serious too from all the preparations that are being made."

"They're taking in some of the sails," remarked Grant.

"I'm glad of that," exclaimed Fred. "When that storm hits us I don't want any more canvas spread than is necessary."

"Perhaps it won't hit us," said George hopefully.

"You're an optimist, Pop, I'm afraid," said Fred. "I think it'll hit us all right."

"The breeze is going down," said John suddenly.

"It surely is," agreed Grant. "The lull before the storm."

"Look at that cloud now," exclaimed Fred. "It's spreading all over the sky and see how fast it is going. It'll be dark in a few minutes."

"Why don't they take the rest of the sails in?" demanded John nervously. "I must say I don't like this."

"They've taken in the topsails and the mizzen," said Grant. "That's a big part."

A lull had now come over the crew and the four young friends were unconsciously affected by it. Now there was not a breath of air stirring; the

sails hung heavy and motionless from the yards. Blacker and blacker grew the sky; the stillness all about became appalling. No one spoke a word, but every one stood around as though waiting for something serious to happen. The crew was gathered about the forward hatchway silently watching the approach of the storm.

Mr. Johnson, the mate, went forward and gave some order in a low tone. More sails were taken in, all in a solemn and quiet manner. The brig now lay motionless on the water while an uneasy expectation of something threatening seemed to hang overhead. The suspense was terrible. Captain Dodge paced silently up and down the deck but he spoke to no one and no one spoke to him. It was now so dark it was almost impossible to see the length of the ship.

Again Mr. Johnson came forward and gave another low-voiced command. Two sailors, one of whom was Petersen, started up the mast to clew down the main top-gallant sail. They had just reached the fore-top-gallant yard when a strange thing happened.

"Look," cried John, in an awe struck voice.

"What is that?" demanded Fred in a frightened whisper.

"A corposant," said Grant. "I've read about them."

Over and directly above the heads of the two

sailors appeared a light. It was in the shape of a ball and hung to the very top of the mast.

"What's a corposant?" whispered John.

"I don't know," replied Grant, "except that that's what they call a ball of light like that one. If it goes up it's supposed to be good luck, but if it comes down it's bad."

"I wish Petersen wasn't up there," muttered Fred.

"Don't be silly, Fred," exclaimed Grant sharply. The tension was affecting every one's nerves. It was almost pitch dark on the *Josephine* now.

"I can't help it," insisted Fred. "I wish it was some one else up there."

"It's gone," remarked John suddenly.

"No, it isn't," George corrected. "There it is, down on the yard."

"It came down then," said Fred. "I knew it would."

"Don't blame Petersen," exclaimed Grant. "It's not his fault."

The two sailors had climbed down quickly after their task was completed and now joined the rest of the crew. All together they stood and watched the strange light until after playing about the mast for some ten minutes or so it disappeared as suddenly as it had come.

Somebody passed the spot where the four boys

stood. It was too dark to make out who it was but the young sailors could hear him moaning and groaning to himself. "Dat Finn," he groaned. "Oh, Lawdy, dat Finn. Ah knowed it all de time. We sho' is goners now."

"There goes Sam," whispered Fred.

"Let him go," said Grant shortly.

"Here comes the rain," exclaimed John suddenly.

A few huge drops fell upon the deck and at the same time the darkness seemed to grow even deeper than before.

"There's thunder too," said George. A few low rumbles were heard, while off to the southwest appeared some random flashes of lightning.

"Where's the storm?" demanded Fred. "So far nothing has happened. This stillness and darkness are getting on my nerves."

"Wait," counseled Grant, and scarcely had he spoken when there was a blinding flash of light. Almost at the same instant came a deafening peal of thunder. The sky directly overhead seemed to open up and down came the water in torrents.

Unconsciously the four boys drew closer together, so startled were they by this unexpected happening. It seemed as if the brig must have been struck but evidently it had escaped, for a second later there was another flash and report

and the bare masts could be seen outlined against the inky sky.

Flash followed flash in quick succession. The whole ocean was lighted up by the constant blaze of light. Peal after peal rattled overhead with a noise so violent that it seemed as if the whole earth must be shaken. After a few moments the deluge of rain abated but the thunder and the lightning continued incessantly. So far there had not been a breath of air stirring; the *Josephine* lay motionless on the surface of the ocean and seemed to the people on board of her an excellent and easy target for the fury of the elements.

Several times one of the boys started to speak but his words were lost in the roar of the storm. They were almost blinded by the lightning but no one thought of going below. This was their first experience in a tropical storm and they were frightened. They would not have been ashamed to admit it either. They did not care to go to their bunks, for every one wanted to be on deck where he could see what was going on.

The lightning played all about the ship and it seemed a miracle that she was not hit. It seemed to run up and down the masts, across the yards and over the anchors, but thus far the *Josephine* had escaped. All this time there had been no wind; the brig lay motionless and powerless to move.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash and a ripping, tearing sound accompanied by the smell of burnt wood. So severe had been the blaze of light that every one was temporarily blinded by it and for a few seconds everything looked red. A moment later, however, when the crew had recovered somewhat from the shock a great shouting and running to and fro began.

"We're hit," cried Grant, the first to regain his senses.

"The ship's on fire," shouted Fred excitedly.

As he spoke a few red tongues of flame appeared from the hatch. Orders were instantly given and a brigade to fight the fire was formed almost at once. It was difficult work, however, for the night was so dark that it was nearly impossible to see one's way around the deck. The flashes of lightning were about the only help afforded to the emergency firemen.

The four young friends were among the first to join in this work. Buckets were passed from hand to hand and the men worked feverishly. No one shirked for an instant and in fact no one dared to do so, for without their ship the men were nearly helpless, left to the mercy of the ocean.

"The wind's coming up," exclaimed Grant suddenly.

What he said was true. It was also raining

hard once more, though the thunder and lightning had somewhat abated.

“The wind means our finish,” said Fred grimly. “We’ll never stop this fire now.”

“We must,” cried John doggedly. “We’re lost if we don’t.”

Every one redoubled his efforts but the fire gained steadily. Higher and higher leaped the flames and farther and farther astern they crept. The crew worked like demons but their task was hopeless. The fire was too mighty for them and it was soon evident to every one on board that the *Josephine* was a doomed ship.

CHAPTER VI

ADRIFT

CAPTAIN DODGE stood near by urging on his men. Nor did he shirk any of the work himself. He fought the flames with all the fury of a determined man, but it soon became plain that it was an unequal struggle and that the *Josephine* would never reach Buenos Aires or any other port for that matter.

"Man the boats!" shouted the captain.

The lifeboats were loosened on the davits and made ready to launch. A stock of provisions was placed on board of every one of them and preparations were made to embark. The four Go Ahead boys were assigned to one boat, together with Sam the cook and Petersen the Finn sailor.

"That'll never do," said John in a low voice to Grant. "Sam and Petersen in the same boat are bound to have trouble."

"I'm afraid so myself, String," said Grant, "but what can we do? Captain Dodge gave the orders and we must do as he says."

"Wouldn't he change them?"

"He might, of course, but I'm not going to ask him to."

“No,” said John ruefully, “I don’t suppose we could do that. I guess we’ll have to put up with it.”

The wind had been steadily increasing in violence since the fire started and now was blowing almost a gale. It whipped the waves into foam and whistled and shrieked through the rigging. The fire, fanned by the breeze, now roared menacingly while its volume increased steadily. It was only too evident that it would be impossible to remain on board the *Josephine* many moments more.

“We’d better get away from here,” said Fred nervously, as he watched the mass of flame and smoke which now enveloped the whole forward part of the ship.

“When we do leave we won’t be much better off,” said Pop gloomily.

“Just the same I’d rather take my chances with the ocean than with this fire,” exclaimed Grant.

“Where are we going?” demanded John.

“How do I know?” said Grant. “We must leave, that’s sure. What we are to do after we leave is another matter.”

“Stand by to lower away!” came the order.

The four boys sprang to their positions. Petersen and Sam joined them a moment later. The negro cook was half-crazed with fear and still kept mumbling to himself, “Dat Finn, dat Finn.” Undoubtedly he did not understand that Petersen was

to go on the same boat with him or he would not have consented to step aboard. Now, in the darkness it was almost impossible to recognize anybody and Sam probably had no idea who any of his companions were to be.

“Lower away.”

The boats descended rapidly and soon rested upon the water where they danced and bobbed about like corks on the angry waves.

“Get aboard, Sam,” urged Grant.

Making no objection, the negro quickly lowered himself into the waiting boat. Fred, John, Grant and George followed in order, leaving only Petersen on board the brig. He stood with the painter in his hand, awaiting the word to leave.

“Unship your oars,” he called.

“All right,” answered Grant.

There were two pairs of oars in the boat and every one of the four boys took charge of one of them. Sam cowered in the bow of the boat shuddering and still murmuring over and over again, “Dat Finn, dat Finn.”

At the sound of Petersen’s voice from the deck above, however, he half raised himself. “Who dat talkin’?” he demanded.

“One of the sailors,” said Grant carelessly, knowing what was passing in the black man’s mind.

“Dat Petersen,” said Sam. “Am he comin’ on dis heah boat?”

"I don't know," Grant answered evasively.

"He bettah not. He bettah not," said Sam fiercely. "We's had enough hard luck on account ob dat man already."

"It wasn't his fault," said Grant trying to quiet the excited negro.

"It was! It was!" Sam fairly shouted, at the same time trying to stand up in the skiff.

"Sit down, Sam," ordered Fred sharply.

"Ah won't sit down," the cook cried menacingly. "Ah won't do nothin' if dat Finn am gwine git in dis heah boat. Ah tells yo' all we's had enough hard luck on account of dat man."

"You'll sit down or get out of the boat," said Grant threateningly. "We won't take any fooling here either."

Sam subsided, but he still mumbled to himself incessantly.

"All right, get aboard," John called to Petersen, though he took care not to call him by name.

Petersen threw the painter and jumped into the stern of the life-boat. The four oarsmen dug their blades into the water and the little craft shot forward. The other boats had also left and the *Josephine* was now a blazing mass of wood. Sparks shot high into the air and in all directions only to fall with a hiss into the angry waters of the sea. The roar of the flames could be heard even

above the noise of the storm which seemed to be increasing in intensity.

The four boys rowed a couple of hundred yards away from the burning brig and then rested on their oars and watched the destruction of the ship on which they had expected to go to South America. She was entirely enveloped in flames now and presented a wonderful but terrible sight as she was rapidly being devoured by the hungry fire.

All the occupants but one of the boat watched the fire. That one was Sam. He still remained huddled in the bow and never once did he look back. He moaned and groaned and raved until the rest of the party began to think that perhaps he was losing his mind.

Farther and farther from the burning ship drifted the tiny boat. All that the crew of it could do was to keep the stern straight into the waves and straighten her out when a great roller sent them flying. Lower and lower appeared the hull of the *Josephine*, when an occasional glimpse could be had of her from the crest of some huge wave. At length she disappeared, entirely burned to the water's edge, and thus came the end of another brave ship. One more was added to the great ocean graveyard, already thick with the bones of many a gallant merchantman.

"She's gone," said George soberly.

"Yes," said John, "and what's going to happen to us?"

"We may be picked up," exclaimed Fred hopefully.

"And we may not," added Grant.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked of Petersen.

"I've no idea," was the answer. "Somewhere near the West Indies, or maybe we're right in them now for all I know."

"Then we'll soon find land," said Fred as cheerfully as was possible under the circumstances.

"I hope it isn't the land that's at the bottom of the ocean," said George.

"Don't be so pessimistic, Pop," urged Fred. "What's the matter with you lately?"

"Nothing. We're in a bad fix, that's all."

"Look out for this wave!" warned Grant suddenly as a great mountain of water loomed up behind them.

The little boat was driven along at the speed of a race horse for many, many yards, but fortunately she remained right side up. The four boys managed their oars skillfully and Petersen steered marvelously. Now and then some water was shipped but aside from that no harm came to them.

Gradually the wind died down and the storm abated. Night had now come upon them, however, and they were in a sorry plight.

"Where are the other boats?" asked Grant when an hour of silence had elapsed.

"I've no idea," said Fred. "Has any one seen them?"

No one had. At least every one denied it but Sam, and as he had not once looked around him there was no chance that he had seen anything. Now he was asleep. He had made no move to help in any way and seemed to take it for granted that the others would look after him. His last words before he had closed his eyes were, "Dat Finn."

"We've got some provisions, anyway," said John.

"Yes," agreed George, "but how long do you think they'll last?"

"Plenty long enough to keep us going until we are picked up."

"Don't be so sure of that," George advised. "At any rate, we have no water, and that's even more important than food."

"Yes, we have, too, Pop," corrected Fred. "It's right under my feet."

"Yes, salt water, though," grumbled George.

"Not at all. There's a cask of fresh water right here in the bottom of the boat."

"Give me some, then," exclaimed George eagerly. "I'm half dead with thirst as it is now."

"Don't drink it now, Pop," urged Grant. "We

may be hard pressed for water, as you say, and I think we'd all better wait till morning. Then we can take stock of just what we have here."

"That's right, Grant," agreed John heartily. "Don't you think so, too, Petersen?"

"I do. We can surely get along without food and water until light comes, but in a day or so we may need it very badly."

"You think we'll be out here that long?" demanded Fred.

"I don't know. Still you never can tell, and it's always well to be prepared."

"You're right," acknowledged George. "At any rate, I don't want any water."

It was a characteristic of these four boys that they were usually cheerful under any and all conditions. No matter how hard a thing might be, they bore it willingly if it was necessary. They made complaints if they thought it was unnecessary, but when they knew it was the only thing to be done they never raised a murmur. No sportsman ever complains of a thing that is fair, and what is best for the most people is always fair.

Hour after hour dragged by. To the little band on board the life-boat it seemed as if morning would never come. The storm had passed, but the water was still rough and the night still inky dark. Now and again the boys dozed off and caught a few winks of sleep. No attempt to row had been

made for several hours. Petersen steered the boat and was the only one who did not rest. Incessantly through the long night he guided the little craft and watched over the safety of those on board.

At last morning came. The first faint streaks of light thrust their rosy fingers up over the eastern horizon and soon the whole sky was covered with an orange glow. Little by little the faint outlines of the occupants of the life boat became visible. What a sorry looking crew it was, too. Disheveled, dirty and unkempt, they plainly showed the effects of their harrowing experience.

As the light crept over the ocean it showed some of the party asleep. The others were haggard and worn looking and seemed to have but small concern as to what happened to them. They lolled on the cross seats in a listless way, not at all interested in the beautiful sunrise. They were more concerned in their own welfare than in the beauties of Nature.

"Oh, hum," yawned Sam, raising himself from the position in which he had lain all night. "We sho' has had a powerful lot of hard—"

He caught sight of Petersen and suddenly ceased talking. A change came over his face as he recognized the man to whom he charged the hard luck that had overtaken them. Hate spread itself over the features of the superstitious negro and his

breath came in short gasps as if some one was choking him.

“Dar yo’ are!” he exclaimed fiercely. “Dar yo’ are, yo’ hard luck Finn. I’ll fix yo’,” and he started to make his way towards the stern of the boat to the spot where his enemy was seated.

CHAPTER VII

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE

“**S**IT down, Sam! Sit down!” cried Fred, who was placed nearest him. “What’s the matter with you? Are you crazy?”

Sam, however, made no answer. He strode forward toward the object of his hatred, paying no attention to Fred’s words and showing an absolute disregard of the danger of falling overboard. Fortunately in this peril the boat was heavy and very steady.

“Get back there!” cried Fred in alarm, trying to grab Sam’s arm.

“Lemme go,” said Sam roughly, knocking Fred’s hand aside.

“Grab him, John. Grab him,” shouted Fred as the excited negro made his way past the seat where he was located.

“Lemme go,” said Sam darkly, and seeing the look on his face John drew back instinctively.

“Hold him, Grant! Grab him, Pop!” shrieked Fred, at the same time rising to his feet and attempting to catch Sam from behind.

He was too late, however. Sam, seeing that he

might be balked in his purpose, took no more chances. He made one flying leap almost over the heads of Grant and George, who were waiting to seize him. This was done so unexpectedly that the two boys were taken by surprise, and though they tried to do as Fred had begged them, they were unsuccessful. Sam tripped and fell forward, but when he landed he fell squarely on top of his enemy.

The boat rocked dangerously. Fred was thrown from his feet and fell headlong to the bottom of the boat. In falling his head struck one of the thwarts, so stunning him that he was unable to move.

"Separate 'em, Grant!" cried John. "Stop that fight!"

Grant threw himself upon the contestants and tried to pinion Sam's arms behind his back. The negro and the sailor were both powerful men, however, and Grant was thrown violently backward as though he had been a mere fly. George caught him just in time to prevent his going overboard.

"I can't stop them," he gasped.

"Hit him on the head," cried John. "Do anything. Make 'em stop. Here, let me get down there," he begged.

"Sit down," shouted George. "Sit down, John, or you'll have us all upset."

"No, I won't, either. Let me get by."

"Sit down, String," begged Grant. "Keep your seat."

"Take this oar, then," cried John. "Hit that coon on the head with it."

"It's too big," exclaimed Grant. "Give me something smaller and I'll hit him all right."

The two men in the stern of the boat were locked in each other's embrace. Sam had had the advantage, for he had landed on top of his adversary. Petersen, however, had muscles of steel, hardened by years of service and labor on shipboard. He tried to grab the black man by the throat. The two slipped to the bottom of the boat, where they struggled for the mastery until the veins stood out on their temples and the sweat rolled from them in streams. Their breath came in gasps. It was a strange sight that the early tropical sun looked down upon.

They wrestled and writhed about on the bottom of the boat, first one on top and then the other. It seemed miraculous that they did not go overboard. The space in which they struggled was so limited that it was next to impossible for any one of the boys to get himself in a position to separate the fighters. Several times Grant tried, but he was always driven back, and after several narrow escapes from falling into the water he gave up the attempt. Fred still lay quietly in the bow, too dazed to be of assistance.

"We must stop this," cried John. "They'll kill each other."

"I know it, String," agreed Grant, "but what can we do?"

"Hit Sam over the head. He's the one that started it."

"I can't get to his head. His feet are pointed this way and every time I try I get a few swift kicks and nothing more."

"But we must do something to stop them," urged George.

"All right, Pop," said Grant grimly. "You suggest something."

"Isn't there a club in the boat?"

"I don't see any."

"Throw water on them."

"We might do that," exclaimed Grant. "Hand me that canvas bucket, String."

Grant filled it to the brim with water and then soused it as nearly as he could into the faces of the fighters. The only effect it seemed to have was to revive them both and the struggle was continued with renewed fury.

"That won't do," cried Grant.

"It seems to be a question of who will weaken first," remarked John, grimly. "I guess we'll have to sit and watch until that time."

"Not at all," exclaimed George. "I say we all pile on and make them quit."

"And all go overboard if we try that," said Grant. "You forget that we're in a boat, Pop."

"Let me up there, then," urged George. "I'm sure I can end the fight."

Grant gave way to his comrade, only too willing to let some one else try his hand at the problem. They changed places carefully and George prepared to put his plan into execution.

"You better stay here beside me, Grant," he exclaimed suddenly.

"What for?"

"We'll each grab a foot and pull for all we're worth."

"What good will that do?"

"If we can pull one of them away it ought to stop the fight, oughtn't it? A man can't fight with himself."

"All right," agreed Grant. "We'll see what we can do, anyway."

"Be careful now," advised George as Grant took his place beside him. "This is pretty ticklish business."

The two boys knelt side by side on one of the seats. They leaned forward, eagerly waiting for a chance to seize the infuriated negro by his feet. This was no easy task, however, for his feet flew in all directions and kicked viciously backward, so that a few bruises were the sole results of the first attempts of the two boys.

"Hit him on the shins," advised John. "That'll fix him."

"We'll try this first," said Grant doggedly. His knuckles were bleeding and his forearms were sore from the treatment he had received from Sam's boots. The pain made him angry and more determined than ever to accomplish his purpose.

The fight was now desperate, even more so than before. No human beings could continue at such a killing pace for long, however. Sam still had the advantage which he had held from the beginning. His great powerful hands were now feeling for Petersen's throat, and from the expression in the Finn's eyes it was evident that he could not hold out much longer. Help must come to him and come quickly.

"I've got him," cried Grant suddenly as he caught hold of one of Sam's feet. "Grab the other one, Pop. Quick."

George grabbed all right, and held on, too. He received a blow over an eye which opened up an ugly cut, but still he hung on desperately.

"Now, pull!" shouted John. "Pull with all your might!"

Both boys exerted themselves to the utmost. They braced themselves and pulled with all the strength that was in them. It was difficult for them even to hang on, however, for Sam struggled

desperately and the two boys were thrown all about. Still they retained their hold.

"You've got him," encouraged John. "Hold him."

Suddenly Sam doubled up his legs, drawing both Grant and George forward, almost on their faces. Then quick as a flash he shot out with both feet, striking the two boys each full in the chest. Their grip was torn loose and they were sent sprawling backward, over the seat onto John, who too was bowled over so that all four boys lay in a heap on the bottom of the boat.

Grant was the first to regain his senses, and a strange sight greeted his eyes. Sam and Petersen were now on their feet, still locked in each other's arms. Suddenly the Finn wrenched an arm free and drawing back struck the negro a stunning blow squarely between the eyes. Sam's arms half dropped to his sides and he reeled drunkenly. Then quick as a flash he once more seized his enemy in his embrace and a moment later the two men went overboard.

CHAPTER VIII

A SORRY PLIGHT

THERE was a great splash. The sturdy life-boat rocked dangerously and then all was still.

John and George had now lifted themselves from their fallen position and all three boys peered eagerly about.

"Where are they? What happened?" demanded John.

"They went overboard," exclaimed Grant.

"But where are they?"

"There they are, over there," cried George.
"Get out the oars."

A dark head appeared for an instant and then sank beneath the surface of the water once more.

"That's Sam," cried John excitedly. "Swing the boat around."

"I'm doing my best," panted George as he dipped one oar deep into the water and pulled with all his might. In response to his efforts the boat came around until it was directly over the spot where Sam's head had appeared. John and Grant hung over the sides ready to seize the negro the moment he was seen again.

"There he is," cried Grant suddenly, and he made a lunge at Sam, who had come to the surface for the second time.

"Get him?" demanded John.

"Yes. Help me, somebody!"

John sprang to his assistance and a moment later the two boys dragged the half-drowned negro over the side into the boat.

"Where's Petersen?" demanded Grant, loosing his hold on Sam and allowing him to sink to the bottom of the boat. "Have you seen him, Pop?"

"No," said George, "I haven't. I've looked everywhere for him, too."

Fred had now recovered somewhat from the blow he had received and he joined the others in their search for the missing sailor. The four boys stood up in the boat and peered about them anxiously in every direction.

"Are you sure he didn't come up, Pop?" asked Grant.

"I told you I've been looking for him," said George. "I haven't seen him at all."

"But he must have come up," protested John.

"Maybe he did," acknowledged George. "I don't believe it, though, for I've certainly been on the lookout."

"What shall we do?" demanded John in dismay.

"What can we do?" said George.

"But he'll drown."

"He probably has already," said Grant.
"Think how long he's been under."

"And you mean to say we'll never even find his body?" said John, almost unnerved by the sudden catastrophe.

"We're going to look, anyway," said Grant decidedly.

"Suppose we row around in a circle for a while," Fred suggested.

"We can try at least," said Grant, and fitting the oars into the oarlocks the four boys rowed slowly about, all the time keeping a sharp lookout in all directions. Meanwhile Sam lay motionless on the bottom of the boat. For at least half an hour the search was continued, but not one glimpse of the missing Petersen did they secure.

"I'm afraid it's no use," exclaimed Grant at last.

"I guess not," agreed John. "It wouldn't do us any good if we did find him now. He's surely drowned by this time."

"No doubt of it," said Grant.

"And there's the fellow who did it," exclaimed George, pointing to Sam, who still lay huddled in a heap in the stern. No one had paid the slightest attention to the negro since he had been hauled

aboard. He was exhausted, but in no danger, as could be plainly seen from his regular and heavy breathing.

"We ought to throw him overboard, too," said John.

"He's not entirely to blame," said Grant. "He's ignorant and superstitious and doesn't know any better, but we do, and we must act accordingly."

"He committed a crime, though," said John, "and we ought to hand him over to the authorities."

"What authorities?" said Grant with a grim smile. "Just look around you. There isn't even a boat or a bit of land in sight, let alone authorities."

"Then we ought to punish him ourselves," insisted John.

"Who are we to do a thing like that?" said George. "We've no right to take the law into our own hands."

At this moment Sam stirred and finally sat up. He was soaking wet still and very weak. He blinked at the sun, which was now shining brightly, and looked dazedly about him. The four boys watched him in silence.

"Where is I?" demanded Sam at length.

"Where do you think you are?" exclaimed John. "You're in a boat."

"De *Josephine*," muttered Sam. "Where am de *Josephine*?"

"As though you didn't know," said John scornfully. "You needn't try to bluff us."

"What dat?" said Sam in a puzzled way. "What dat you say?"

"I said you knew just as well as we do where the *Josephine* is," said John, "and that you needn't try to bluff us, either."

The black man looked straight at John as though he did not understand a word that was said to him. His face was an absolute blank and if he was acting, he certainly did it well. He glanced down at his clothes.

"Ah's all wet," he murmured to himself.

"I suppose you don't remember jumping into this boat and being out here all night," exclaimed John skeptically, though he was nettled by Sam's appearance of innocence.

Sam merely looked at him and shook his head.

"How about your fight with—"

"Keep quiet, John," said Grant sharply.

"Don't mention that yet."

"What dat?" asked Sam, looking curiously from one boy to the other.

"Nothing, Sam," said Grant quickly. "Don't you remember the fire?"

"De fire?" said Sam, completely mystified. "Wha' fire?"

“On the *Josephine*,” exclaimed John. “Don’t you know that she burned to the water’s edge?”

“Ah does remember dat fire now,” said Sam eagerly, a gleam of understanding showing in his face. “She done come out ob de hatchway, didn’t she?”

“It did,” agreed Grant. “After that don’t you remember how we all jumped into the boats and rowed away? Don’t you remember that?”

“Deed Ah don’t,” said Sam. “Ah don’t remembah a thing about dat ar.”

“Are you sure?” demanded John sharply.

“Sho’ Ah is,” exclaimed Sam sincerely. It did not seem to the four boys that he could be fooling, his manner seemed so earnest.

For some moments no one on the little boat spoke a word. The boys sat and looked at Sam, and he sat and looked at them and at the boat and the boundless ocean stretching on every side as far as the eye could see. Not a sign of life could be seen on it anywhere. There was no trace of the other boats that had set out from the burning brig and it was impossible to conjecture what had happened to them.

Finally Sam sighed deeply and he sank back against the stern of the boat as though he was exhausted. His eyes half closed and he yawned sleepily.

"Ah's tired," he murmured, and straightway fell asleep once more.

"What do you think of it?" demanded John a moment later.

"Think of what?" asked Fred.

"Do you think that Sam really doesn't remember all that happened?"

"It's possible, all right," said Grant.

"But how could it be?" John insisted.

"Well, I'll tell you," explained Grant. "Sam was scared to death in that storm; you all know that. He was moaning and groaning around the boat and when the fire started he might easily have gone out of his head. Perhaps he was even stunned by the lightning. Since that time he has been in a state of unconsciousness, and now he doesn't remember a thing that he did. Oh, I think it's perfectly possible."

"It's certainly strange," mused George.

"It surely is," exclaimed John. "Still if he wasn't telling the truth he certainly is a fine actor."

"I've heard of such things happening before," remarked Fred.

"What do you mean?" said John.

"Why, people being in sort of a blank state when they do things that they don't remember at all later."

"What made Sam that way?" said John.

"I told you," exclaimed Grant. "He was so frightened it probably drove him temporarily out of his head. Unconsciously he blamed it all on poor Petersen so that when he saw him right here in the same boat, his one idea was to get revenge."

"Can we blame him then?" said Fred. "If a man doesn't know what he is doing, is he responsible?"

"I'd hate to decide that," said Grant. "At the same time I don't see how we can hold it against him, especially when he doesn't know what it was."

"When we get back to civilization we may have to tell on him though," remarked John. "Don't you think we'll have to do that?"

"Wait till we get there," advised Grant. "From the look of things right now, it doesn't seem that we are going to get there very soon."

"It's funny we don't see any boats," said George.

"Or land," added John.

"How about some food?" exclaimed Fred. "We haven't eaten in a long time you know."

"That's right," Grant agreed. "We can eat something anyway. Somebody open up the food, and the water too."

Ample provisions for several days were found to have been placed aboard and the taste of food

worked wonders with the unfortunate boys. They were sparing of it, however, and even more careful of their water supply. While in all probability they would be picked up before long by some passing steamer, it was deemed advisable to go slowly. The rations apportioned were divided into five equal parts, the four boys quickly consuming their shares while Sam's was kept out for him until he should awaken.

"Don't a good many steamers pass this way?" said Fred.

"I don't know," said Grant grimly. "Where are we?"

"Somewhere near the West Indies, I suppose," said Fred.

"Perhaps we are," Grant agreed. "Personally I don't know."

"Shall we row?" suggested John.

"What's the use?" exclaimed Fred. "We don't know which way to go."

"I've a compass, you know," said George.

"That won't help us now, I'm afraid," said Grant. "If we knew where we were, it might."

"We're in the tropics all right from the feeling of that sun," said John.

All day long the little party drifted idly about on the ocean. The water was almost still, as there was hardly a breath of air stirring. Not a sail appeared to break the monotony of the scene and

the boys began to feel worried. The sun was scorching and they had no protection at all. Finally, night came with a welcome fall in temperature, but otherwise they were not one whit better off. They seemed just as far from rescue as ever.

CHAPTER IX

IN SEARCH OF LAND

WHEN next the sun rose it shone upon a very disconsolate and discouraged little band. The four boys and their negro companion were becoming very down-hearted. Thus far they had not seen a sign of a boat. It almost seemed as if they were on a desert ocean, for in these days of world-wide commerce there are few nooks and crannies of the seven seas not visited by the merchant fleets.

Sam was the most cheerful person on board. Food and sleep had restored his spirits wonderfully and with the characteristic trait of his race, he was almost satisfied as long as he had those two things. No one had mentioned his fight with Petersen to him. If he did not remember it, there was no use in telling him about it. The four boys decided to watch him closely, however, in case he was acting a part. If such was the case he would surely betray himself sooner or later.

The sun was just a little way above the horizon and a scanty breakfast was being served on board the boat. John had just arisen from his seat to help himself to a big sailor-cracker. He turned

and glanced at the newly risen sun and suddenly stopped short, the cracker half way to his mouth.

"What's the matter, String?" demanded Fred, noticing his friend's action.

"Land!" cried John, excitedly.

"Where?" exclaimed the others in one breath, at the same time springing to their feet utterly regardless of whether the boat upset or not.

"Right over there," said John, pointing. "I see hills and palm trees."

"Well, I don't," exclaimed George a moment later. "You're dreaming, String."

"I am not," said John insistently. "Don't any of you fellows see it?"

"It's a mirage," said Grant. "You don't see anything, String."

"Mirage, nothing!" cried John hotly. "I see land and if you all weren't so stupid you'd see it too."

"Maybe you can see it because you are so much taller than we are," suggested Fred.

"Stand up on one of the seats then," said John. "That'll make you as tall as I."

George quickly followed this advice, but he could see no land. Grant, too, tried it but he was no more successful. They all began to make fun of John.

"Something has gone to your head, String," teased George. "You're seeing things."

John, however, was so angry by this time that he would not pay the slightest attention to such remarks. His face was flushed and he still stared sullenly out across the water in the direction of the rising sun. Suddenly his jaw dropped, and a look of amazement spread itself over his features. His eyes were round with surprise.

"It's gone," he exclaimed in consternation.

"Ha, ha," laughed George, derisively. "I told you it was a mirage."

"Perhaps, the wind blew it away," suggested Fred.

"You all think you're pretty smart," said John, a half-foolish grin on his face. "I swear I thought I saw land over there."

"Well, I tell you what we do," suggested Grant. "String thought he saw land over in that direction, but it's gone now. Just the same I say we row that way and see what we can see."

"What's the point in that?" demanded Fred. "You don't really think he saw anything, do you?"

"No, I don't. At the same time we can't be any worse off than we are now, and String's seeing the mirage may have been an omen. Perhaps there is land somewhere over there after all."

"I'm willing," agreed George. "What do you say?"

"Let's try it," exclaimed Fred. "As Grant

says we can't be any worse off than we are now. Perhaps we'll be better."

"Ah think dat's a fine idea," said Sam enthusiastically. "Ah can row, too."

"No, you steer," directed Grant. "Give me your compass, Pop, and set a course for him. You follow it exactly, Sam."

"Ah sho' will," agreed Sam, delighted at the idea of having no work to do and the responsibility of steering the boat.

"I guess I'm not a pretty handy sort of a fellow to have around," George remarked with a grin as he took the compass from around his neck and handed it to Sam. "I haven't written in my diary lately, though."

"Have you still got that with you, Pop?" exclaimed John.

"Surely. You don't think I'd lose that, do you?"

"I thought you might in all this mixup."

"No, indeed," said George warmly. "I wouldn't lose my diary for anything."

"Give Sam the course to steer," exclaimed Grant. "You all talk so much."

"All right," laughed George, and setting the compass on the bottom of the boat between the negro's feet he directed him to steer a little south of east. This was the direction in which John had seen his phantom island.

"I have a plan," said Fred. "I say we all row steadily for an hour without looking around. At the end of that time we'll all stand up and I feel sure we'll see land not far away."

"How are you going to tell when the hour is up?" inquired John. "There isn't a watch in the whole crowd that will run. I'm afraid it's too warm for even the sun to be on time."

"Then we'll have to guess at it. Is everybody agreeable?"

"Suppose a boat appears ahead of us," suggested George. "We might never see it."

"Sam is facing that way," said Fred. "He will see it and can tell us. Unless he sees a boat, though, he is not to say a word."

"That's a go," said Grant. "Is everybody ready?"

The word was given and the life-boat shot forward on its course. The game being played served to cheer up the members of the little party and as a matter of fact no one had remained greatly worried about their condition for any length of time. Youth is always hopeful and every one on board had always had the feeling deep in his heart that they would be rescued before long. Lack of food and water had not assailed them as yet.

"The hour must be nearly up," remarked George at last.

"Huh," snorted Fred. "I don't believe we've been going over twenty minutes."

"Certainly not an hour," agreed Grant. "Stick to it a while longer, Pop."

"All right," sighed George, "but I know we've been working at least an hour."

"You never worked an hour in your life," said John. "How do you know how long it is?"

"I warn you not to talk like that," said George, pretending to be angry. "I am sitting right behind you, you know, and it would be no trouble at all for me to give you a good, swift punch in the middle of the spine."

"Oh, Pop," exclaimed Fred. "How blood-thirsty you're getting."

"I'm thirsty for a drink of water, that's sure," exclaimed George.

"You'll have to wait until the hour is up," said Grant.

"I say it's up now."

"The rest of us say not, though," reminded Grant. "Besides that, we're three to your one, so we can make you do pretty much as we please."

"Is that so?" exclaimed George haughtily. "Well, if I want to turn my head around I don't know who could stop me."

"Don't try it," warned Fred, who pulled the bow oar. "You'll be sorry."

"How about Fred up there?" demanded John.

"We've all got our backs turned to him and he may look around every minute for all we know."

"Sam can see him," exclaimed Grant. "Has he looked around yet, Sam?"

"Ah ain't seen him if he has," replied Sam, grinning from ear to ear and showing a double row of ivory teeth.

"If he does, you just tell us," said Grant, "and we'll fix him."

"Yas, sah," grinned Sam. "Ah'll report all right."

"Seen any boats yet, Sam?" demanded George.

"No," said Sam before Grant could stop him.

"Look here, Pop," exclaimed Grant hotly, "you ought not to have asked him that question. We made an agreement not to look around, but what's the use if you aren't going to live up to it?"

"Did I look around?" demanded George.

"No, but—"

"Well, that's all I agreed to."

"I know, but—"

"Seen any land, Sam?" asked George. He knew how angry he was making Grant, but one of his main objects in life was to tease people.

"Ah ain't sayin'," said Sam warily. "Yo' all ain't gwine to ketch me nappin' again."

"That's right, Sam," exclaimed Grant; "don't you answer a single question that any one asks you."

“Oh, Grant,” mocked George, at the same time pitching his voice like a girl’s. “I think you’re just horrid.”

“Hit him, somebody!” exclaimed Fred laughingly. “Don’t let him live.”

At this moment, however, George, who had been paying more attention to the conversation than the rowing, caught a crab. He lost his balance completely and toppled over backward, sprawling at full length on the bottom of the boat. As a consequence the whole crew was disorganized. The agreement not to look around was entirely forgotten and all heads were turned to look at George.

Suddenly John stood up in the boat and cheered at the top of his voice.

“Look there!” he cried. “There’s land this time, all right!”

CHAPTER X

ASHORE

ALL eyes were immediately turned in the direction in which John pointed. Sure enough, and every one saw it this time, land appeared far off on the distant horizon. It could be seen only faintly, but there was no mistaking it. The low-lying shore and the outline of a few hills were plainly visible.

“What do you think of that?” exclaimed Grant joyously. “It certainly looks as if our luck had turned.”

“Sho’ it has,” said Sam readily. “Soon as we lef’ dat hard luck Finn Ah knowed we’d be all right. Ah suttinly is glad Ah is not in de same boat wid him.”

These words of Sam threw a sudden damper upon every one in the boat. The four boys looked at one another in consternation and much of their joy at the sight of land was taken away by the recollection of the tragic end of their shipmate Petersen. Sam, however, seemed entirely unconscious of having said anything out of the way. His face was wreathed in smiles and showed noth-

ing but satisfaction, now that he was separated from Petersen. If any doubt had still lingered in the boys' minds as to Sam's sincerity that doubt was now dispelled. There was no question at all that the negro recalled nothing of his tragic deed.

"What's de mattah wid you gentlemen?" demanded Sam, noticing the strange behavior of the four young sailors.

"Nothing at all," said Grant quickly.

"Let's row for shore," exclaimed John, doing his best to change the subject.

"That's what I say," agreed George, who had now picked himself up and had taken hold of his oar once again. "I want to feel some good old earth under my feet for a change."

"That's right," said Grant. "Let's not waste any time."

They dug their oars into the water and with renewed energy set out for the distant shore. Now and again they turned around and looked ahead in an effort to discover the character of the land they were approaching. It was still far away, however, and not much idea could be had of it.

"It's an island all right," said John confidently.

"Probably," agreed Grant. "I don't think we were very near the mainland when the *Josephine* burned."

"Look there," cried Fred all at once. "Look back of the boat there."

Every one immediately stopped rowing and craned his neck to see what Fred was pointing out.

"What is it, Fred?" demanded George. "What do you see?"

"Don't you see that fin?"

"Dat Finn!" exclaimed Sam. "Where dat Finn?"

"Not the one you mean," said Fred, smiling in spite of his evident excitement. "I mean the fin of a fish."

"I see it," cried John suddenly. "What is it?"

"What is it," repeated Fred. "Don't you know?"

"A shark?"

"Of course it is," said Fred. "It must be a whopper, too."

Every one else saw the fin now and involuntarily a shiver passed over most of those on the little boat. The great black fin sailed easily and steadily along, just cutting the top of the water. Gruesome and forbidding it looked and straightway recalled to the minds of the four boys the stories they had so often heard of the hordes of man-eating sharks that infested the waters of the West Indies.

"There's another," cried Grant suddenly.

Sure enough another fin joined the first and one ahead of the other the sharks cruised around the waters near the life-boat.

"Zowie!" exclaimed George. "I guess I'm glad I'm not in the water just now."

"Same here," said Fred thankfully. "I wonder what they'd do to you."

"Well, I'm not curious enough to find out," said George grimly. "They can't touch us here in the boat, anyway."

"That's true enough," said Grant. "I say we don't waste any more time looking at them, either. Personally, I'd rather be ashore."

Once more the oars were dipped into the water and the voyage was continued. The sharks also came along and their fins could be seen first on one side of the boat and then on the other; sometimes they appeared in front and sometimes astern. Relentlessly they followed, however, all the way to the shore.

As the boat came nearer the land the boys got more of an idea of the place they were approaching.

"I don't see any houses," remarked John.

"Nor I," agreed Fred. "It doesn't look as if there was a human being on the island. It looks fertile enough, though."

"Well, we'll know all about it before long," said Grant. "Where shall we land?"

"What's the matter with that little harbor straight ahead?" said Fred.

"All right," exclaimed Grant. "Steer us in there, Sam."

"No matter what kind of a place it is I'll certainly be glad to get on shore again," said George eagerly. "I've had about all I want of boats for a while."

"I agree with you, Pop," said Fred. "I've had enough, too."

"I wish we'd see a steamer," sighed John.

"I wish a steamer would see us," said Grant. "I think that would be more to the point."

"We've simply got to be picked up soon," said John. "Our food won't last a great many days longer."

"It's good for a week, anyway," said Fred. "Some one will surely find us by that time. We can hoist a flag on top of that hill up there. A passing steamer would be sure to see it."

"There may be people on the island for all we know," said Grant. "We can't see it all from here and it must be at least a mile long."

"We'll know soon, anyway," exclaimed John. "Don't run us onto any rocks on the way in, Sam."

"No, sah," grinned Sam. "Jes' leave dat to me."

The shore of the island was low and sandy. Wide white beaches ran down to the water's edge,

while a short distance back were many palms and other trees of which the boys did not know the names. As Fred remarked, the island certainly looked fertile. Great excitement filled the breasts of every member of the party as they neared the shore.

"The sharks have gone," exclaimed John suddenly.

"Sure enough," said George. "I had forgotten all about them."

"There they are out there," said Grant indicating a spot some fifty yards astern of the boat. "They're not alone, either."

Ten or a dozen great fins could be seen weaving in and out in the place Grant had indicated.

"It must be shallow in here," remarked Fred. "That's probably why they don't come in any closer. Look out for going aground, Sam."

"Not de leas' dangah of dat," replied Sam confidently and whether he knew what he was talking about or not, the fact remains that a few moments later the bow of the boat grounded softly on the white sand, only a few feet from the shore."

"First ashore," cried George leaping overboard and dashing up on the beach.

"Hey, there! Wait a minute," shouted Grant. "We've got to pull this boat up and we'll need everyone's help."

"We'd better take the provisions out," said

Fred a moment later when they had hauled the boat some distance up on the shore.

“What for?” demanded George who was always opposed to doing any more work than was absolutely necessary.

“Put them somewhere in the shade I say,” exclaimed Fred. “Take out that cask of water, too. Those things have been broiling in the sun too long already.”

“Let’s take everything out except the oars,” said Grant. “We’ll probably be here for a couple of days and we might as well do it now as any time. I don’t believe we’ll be picked up before then; at least there is a good chance that we won’t.”

“All right,” agreed George. “Take everything out then. As soon as that’s done though, I’m going to see what the other side of this island looks like.”

“We all will,” said John. “Let’s do this first though.”

They all fell to work with a will and soon had the the boat unloaded. The contents were placed under a sheltering grove of mangrove trees a short distance away. The boat was hauled a little farther up on shore and then the boys prepared to start on their tour of inspection. Sam followed as a matter of course.

“Say, this is a pretty fine island,” exclaimed George as they started out.

"Pineapples," cried Grant, excitedly. "What do you think of that?"

"Are they ripe?" demanded George as the little band swooped down upon the cluster of plants.

"They certainly are," said Grant, who quickly produced his jackknife and cut off the top of one of the pineapples. "Watch me eat it," and he began to eat the juicy fruit with great relish. He was not far ahead of the others, however, for soon they were all busily engaged in the same way.

At last they had their fill of pineapples and moved on. Banana trees were discovered, standing in rows as if they had been planted.

"Somebody lives on this island, or used to anyway," remarked Grant. "Those trees never grew wild like that."

"Of course not," said John. "It doesn't look as though they'd been cultivated lately though."

"We'll find out before long anyway," said Fred. "If there are people here all I hope is that they're not cannibals."

"Dey no cannibals heah," said Sam so seriously that every one laughed.

"I hope not, Sam," said Fred, smiling. "I'd hate to be eaten."

They crossed the island which was not more than a half-mile wide at this point, and that seemed to be the average most of the way. The view was the same as on the opposite side; not a thing to

be seen but the boundless ocean with not a speck of a sail or a bit of land within sight. It was a little kingdom all of its own. A quarter of a mile from shore the low rollers broke ceaselessly on a coral reef, while overhead, the gulls swept around and around, their plaintive whistle being very distinct at times.

In silence the boys stood and gazed at the ocean.

"Looks as if we were alone in the world, doesn't it?" said Fred at last.

"It surely does," said George. "I somehow feel as if there ought to be some sort of a big black king sitting under one of these palm trees with about twenty slaves standing around fanning him."

"Speaking of black," remarked John. "What has happened to Sam?"

"He went back to the boat," said Fred, but as he spoke Sam suddenly appeared, running towards the little group at full speed. That he was greatly excited about something could be plainly seen from his manner.

"What is it, Sam?" demanded Grant as the erstwhile cook came puffing and blowing up to the spot where the four boys stood. "What's the matter?"

"De boat," gasped Sam. "De boat am gone."

CHAPTER XI

A SERIOUS MISHAP

“**T**HE boat gone!” exclaimed Grant in amazement. “What do you mean?”

“What Ah say is dat de boat am gone, dat’s all,” said Sam.

“How could it get away though?” demanded John excitedly. “Who is there to take it?”

“Ah don’t know, sah,” said Sam. “It sho’ is gone though.”

“There must be some one on the island then,” exclaimed John. “I don’t see how it could disappear any other way.”

“Maybe,” admitted Grant. “It certainly is queer.”

The four boys stood amazed, too surprised by this sudden catastrophe at first to do anything. It seemed almost impossible to think that such a thing could be.

“Are you sure you went to the right place, Sam?” demanded Fred.

“Sho’ Ah is,” said Sam. “Dey is no doubt ob it.”

“Let’s all go and have a look,” George suggested.

"The first sensible idea yet, Pop," exclaimed Grant. "Come on, everybody."

Helter skelter and making as fast time as they could, the little party set out to retrace their steps to their landing place. Fear filled their hearts, not only on account of the disappearance of their boat, but also because there was the chance that some one else was on the island who might have stolen it. Not that the boys would not have been glad to see other people, but because they feared that the strangers might turn out to be enemies. Certainly, if they were friends, it seemed queer they should steal the boat.

It was not long before they came to the little harbor. Grant was the first to reach the water's edge and he looked about him eagerly, for traces of the missing boat.

"Here's where it was," exclaimed Fred.

"There isn't even a mark on the beach where it was pulled up," said John. "That's a queer thing it seems to me."

"You're sure this is the spot?" said Grant.

"I know it is," said George, confidently. "There is no doubt of it."

"See any footprints around?" asked Fred.

"None at all," replied John. "What do you think of it all?"

"What do you think, Grant?" inquired George. Grant was always the one to whom the other boys

turned when there was any question to be settled.

Grant stood on the beach and gazed fixedly out to sea.

"What are you looking at?" demanded John.

"I'm looking at our boat," replied Grant quietly.

"What!" exclaimed Fred. "Where is it?"

"Right out there," said Grant, pointing to a white speck that could be faintly seen far out on the water.

"But how did it get there?" insisted Fred.

"It floated," said Grant quietly, "and I'll tell you how. You know we pulled it up on the shore, but I'm afraid we didn't pull it far enough. While we were away, the tide must have come in and floated it off. There it goes, and here we stay, I guess."

"Don't be so sure of that," exclaimed George, and he began to divest himself of his few remaining clothes as rapidly as possible.

"What do you think you're going to do, Pop?" demanded Grant.

"I'm going after that boat."

"By swimming?"

"Of course. How else could I reach it?" and by this time George was almost stripped to his skin.

"Don't be silly, Pop," exclaimed Fred. "That boat is at least a half-mile from shore and you

couldn't possibly catch it. It's getting farther away all the time."

"It's worth a try, isn't it?" demanded George. "You don't want to stay here the rest of your life, do you?" He was a splendid swimmer and had won many prizes in this line of sport. At the same time what he proposed to attempt now was most ambitious.

"You're crazy, Pop," said Grant earnestly. "You can't possibly make it."

"I'll tell you that later," said George doggedly, and he made as if to start down the beach. John, however, seized him and held him firmly.

"Please don't try it," he begged. "You'll only drown."

"Let me go," exclaimed George.

"Think ob dem sha'ks," said Sam. "Dey's millions ob dem out dar."

"That's right, Pop," cried Grant. "Think of those sharks. Even if you could swim that far the sharks would get you."

"Put your clothes on again," said Fred. "We need you worse than we do the boat."

The argument about the sharks had more influence on George than anything else. He did not mind the ocean, but the thought of its hungry inhabitants was too much for him. He yielded to the pleas of his comrades and slowly began to put on his clothes.

"What'll we do?" he said dazedly. "It looks as if we were stranded."

"I guess we are," agreed Grant grimly. "We'll have to sit here and wait until some steamer happens by and picks us up."

"But how will any one know we're here?" said George.

"We'll hoist a flag."

"That's all right, but where are we going to get a flag?"

"I'll show you," exclaimed Grant, and he made his way to the spot where their stores and provisions were piled. A moment later he returned with the canvas tarpaulin that had been used as a cover. "Here's our flag," he said, waving the heavy piece of canvas around his head.

"It's too heavy," objected John. "It would take a gale to make that stand out."

"It is heavy," admitted Grant. "I don't know of anything else we can use though."

"Except my shirt," said George quickly. "That'll make a real flag."

"But what will you wear?" said John.

"Nothing maybe," replied George, cheerfully. "In this climate I don't believe any one would suffer much from lack of clothes."

"Probably not," Grant agreed. "Why use your shirt in preference to any one else's though?"

"Because I offer it first."

"All right," laughed Grant. "Pass it over."

George handed his shirt to Grant and soon the seams were ripped so that it covered the largest amount of possible space. "Now for a flag-pole," exclaimed Grant.

"I'll attend to that," exclaimed Fred and he straightway fell upon a nearby tree with his jack-knife. He cut off one of the longest and straightest branches after considerable trouble, and presented it for his companions' approval. "How's that?" he demanded proudly. "It's about thirty feet long and stuck up on top of that hill, it could be seen for a long, long distance."

"We'll now go up and raise the flag," cried Grant, and leading the way he set out for the top of the hill.

"Look at the brook," exclaimed John suddenly, after they had covered about half the distance to their destination.

"It's not a very big one," remarked George as he stepped across the tiny stream. "I wonder where it comes from."

"We can follow it and see," said Grant. "If the water is good to drink, we are in luck, for we may need it desperately before long."

"It looks clear enough," said Fred. "I'll taste of it."

"Wait till we find the source," advised Grant. "We can tell better then whether it is good or not."

They soon discovered the origin of the little stream. Set in among a grove of scrub palmetto trees was a spring. The water bubbled merrily out into a little pool, the bottom of which was covered with shining white pebbles.

"That looks all right to me," exclaimed Fred eagerly and a moment later he was flat on his stomach, taking long draughts of the clear water.

"Whew, that's fine," he said enthusiastically, as he rose to his feet once more and sighed with satisfaction.

"Is it cool?" asked John.

"It's almost cold," said Fred. "Why don't you try it?"

John did try it and so did every one else. All pronounced it to be just as Fred had described it. "We can live for a long while on that water and the fruit that's here," remarked Fred. "We won't have to worry about starving anyway."

"Just the same we want to get our flag up," exclaimed Grant. "Let's do it now and get it over with."

Without further delay they proceeded to the top of the hill. There were no trees on the summit and for a space of two or three hundred yards, the ground was bare and unobstructed. The very

highest point on the island was selected and there a hole was dug. Sticks and knives and fingers and anything that could be found was used in the task, for no tools had been put in the life-boat.

"If we only had the oars," said George, "we could have tied them all together and made a real flag pole."

"What's the matter with this?" demanded Fred. "It may not be very beautiful, but it'll do the work all right. It's limber too, so that if a high wind comes up it will bend and not break."

"All right," exclaimed George, "put the flag on and we'll set it up."

The sleeves were torn from George's sacrificed shirt. The sleeves in turn were torn into strips and with these the rest of the shirt, or rather the flag, was tied securely to the pole.

"Hoist it up," cried George. "I must say I never expected to have my shirt used for a flag on some deserted island though."

"It makes a good one all right," said Grant. "That ought to be visible for a good long distance."

"Do you suppose any one would take the trouble to investigate if he did see it?" inquired John skeptically.

"Any one would certainly investigate a flag like that," laughed George. "They'd think it was a Chinese laundry or something."

“Maybe they’ll take it for a pirate flag,” suggested Fred.

“This island looks like a good place for pirates all right,” remarked John.

CHAPTER XII

A NEW HOME

THAT night the shipwrecked little band slept out in the open with nothing but the stars over their heads. In fact they had no other shelter, but the night was mild and clear and no one suffered any discomfort.

Thus far the boys had had no chance to explore their new home, but the first thing the next morning they determined to do so. A plunge in the waters of the little bay put every one in good humor. No one went very far out, however, for in spite of the fact that they knew there was slight chance of any shark venturing anywhere so near the shore, the knowledge that the giants were lurking not far away cured every desire to swim out any distance.

Sam decided he would not join the exploring party. He had an idea that he would be very much better off, dozing in the sun at the foot of some palm tree. The four boys separated, Fred and Grant going together, and John and George pairing off.

“You two go one way,” directed Grant, “and we’ll go the other. If we follow the shore we’ll

meet around on the other side of the island somewhere."

"All right," agreed John. "We'll see you later."

"After we see what the shore of the island is like, I say we explore the interior," said George, as he and John walked off down the beach.

"That's what I say," exclaimed John. "That part looks more interesting."

"It does to me, too. There are lots of birds here."

"Do you know the names of them?"

"No, I don't. All I know is that they are certainly beautiful. Look at that one there," exclaimed George suddenly, as there was a flash of scarlet showing for an instant among the trees to their left.

"I wonder if there are any parrots here."

"Wouldn't you like to have one?"

"I certainly would. I'd like to take it home with me."

"If we ever get there."

"Of course we'll get there," said John confidently. "Don't worry about that for a second. Its only a question of how soon it will be."

"Don't be so sure about that, String. We don't know where we are and it certainly seems queer that we haven't seen a single boat. That's what worries me. If many boats went by this way, I

wouldn't worry, but if no boats come along, how are we to be picked up?"

"But some will come."

"They haven't yet."

"It seems to me we ought to have a lookout," said John. "A boat might go right by and we'd never see it at all."

"I know it," said George. "I think we ought to take turns up on top of the hill where the flag is."

"I'm willing. We'll talk about it to Grant and Fred, when we meet them."

"Look at that rock," exclaimed George suddenly.

"What's the matter with it?"

"Look at its shape."

"It is queer," admitted John. "It looks like a fish."

"Doesn't it? Maybe it's a petrified shark."

"I guess not that," laughed John. "Still it is shaped more like a shark than anything else, isn't it? Isn't it queer?"

The odd shaped rock made a great impression on the two boys, and it was a queer freak of nature. Black in color and about thirty feet long the great boulder stood out as a remarkable evidence of nature's handiwork. It lay in a small opening in the midst of a grove of palm trees. The two boys drew near to investigate more closely and were

amazed at the smoothness of its surface and the way it glistened in the sunlight.

"This is certainly strange," exclaimed George. "It looks as if it might have been under water for hundreds of years and was worn smooth this way by the waves."

"It's so different from the other rocks, too," said John. "I wonder what made it black this way."

"Do you notice," remarked George, "that it doesn't look so much like a shark when you are close to it? When we first saw it, it certainly did though."

"Didn't it? Let's go back to that spot again."

They retraced their steps and once more viewed the odd shaped rock from the place where they had first caught sight of it. More than ever were they impressed by its weird resemblance to a giant shark.

"We'll certainly have to tell Grant and Fred about this," said John. "We'll bring them down here to look at it too."

The two friends resumed their walk along the shore and before many moments had passed they caught sight of Fred and Grant.

"What do you think they're looking at?" exclaimed George.

"I don't know, Pop," returned John. "They

certainly seem interested in something though, don't they?"

Fred and Grant were lying face downward on a rock which overhung the water. Their gaze and attention seemed riveted on what they saw below them, so that they did not even hear their friends approach.

"What are you two looking at?" demanded George curiously.

Grant looked up at the sound of his comrade's voice but he did not answer. He merely beckoned with one finger and then pointed to the water below. John and George were not long in taking their places alongside the other two and soon they were just as engrossed in what they saw as were their companions.

The water was deep right up to the shore. It was also as clear as crystal so that everything in it could be seen with remarkable distinctness. Sand was mixed with coral on the bottom and the water was populated with fish, and such strange fish too. All sizes, shapes and colors they were; some almost flat with strange little pig-like mouths; others chunky and with flat backs as though some one had hammered them out. All of them, however, were wonderfully provided with marvelous coloring, some of them with shades that changed from time to time. A brilliant green ray, shaped

like an eel, lay coiled about a piece of coral; he opened his mouth with its wicked looking teeth and sucked in the water which he could be seen to expel a moment later from his gills.

For a long time the four boys lay and watched these things in silence. It was like a fairy story to see all these strange inhabitants of the tropic seas.

"Whew," sighed Fred at length, "that's a wonderful sight."

"I should say so," exclaimed John heartily. "This is a wonderful island too. I am almost glad we were stranded here."

"I'd be too," said George, "if I was only certain we were going to get off all right."

"Guess what Fred and I found this morning," said Grant.

"It wasn't any more wonderful than what Pop and I saw," retorted John.

"What did you see?" demanded Grant.

"A rock that's shaped just like a shark."

"Huh," snorted Fred. "That's not half as good as what we found."

"Tell us what it was then," said George.

"Tracks," said Grant.

"Tracks. What kind of tracks."

"Can't you guess?"

"Not railroad?" suggested George and he put

up his arm as though he expected to have to ward off a blow.

“Don’t be silly, Pop;” exclaimed Grant. “Of course they weren’t.”

“Man tracks?” queried John.

“No,” said Fred. “They were goat tracks.”

“Is that right?” exclaimed George. “Did you see any goats?”

“No, but we saw a good many tracks.”

“I told you this was a wonderful island,” said John heartily. “You see we’ve even got a herd of goats here.”

“I don’t know what good they’ll do us though,” said Fred.

“Why not?” demanded John. “If we can catch one we can have it to eat.”

“That’s all right,” said Fred, “but how are you going to cook it without fire?”

“We’ll build one of course.”

“Without matches?”

“Pop has some matches. Haven’t you, Pop?” inquired John.

“Why, certainly,” said George with a great air of importance. “I have everything of that kind. Wasn’t I the fellow who had the compass too? I keep a diary and I have a compass and I have some matches in a waterproof box. Who says that I’m not a good man to have on any party?”

"Oh, you're a fine fellow all right," laughed Grant. "Personally I don't know what good your compass will do us though. Your matches are all right and I advise you to be very careful with them."

"Leave that to me," said George. "I'll be careful all right."

"Who's going to catch these goats?" demanded Fred.

"We haven't gotten as far as that yet," said Grant laughingly. "I guess we'll have to put salt on their tails."

"Not at all," exclaimed John seriously. "We'll make spears and get them that way. Tomorrow we'll have a goat hunt."

"Maybe we will," said George skeptically. "Just at present though, I say we do a little more exploring. We haven't seen much of the interior of the island yet."

"Come along then," cried Grant. "We'll all go."

With Grant in the lead, they started. Every moment added to the new delights the little island afforded. The tropical foliage was brilliant and the bird-life seemed endless in its variety. The sides of the small hill which the exploring party was ascending, however, were rocky and when they were about halfway up, Grant suddenly stopped short in surprise.

“Look there,” he exclaimed. “There’s a cave.”

A dark opening in the rocks showed just ahead and there was a mad race to see which boy should arrive at the spot first. It was a steep ascent, but just in front of the cave was a flat ledge of rocks some ten or fifteen feet wide which made a sort of front yard.

Grant was the first to reach the entrance and even before he looked into the cave he stopped and picked up two objects from the ground at his feet.

“What have you got?” demanded John.

Grant held the two articles in question up to view. “An old flint-lock pistol and a powder-horn,” he said.

CHAPTER XIII

AN IRON CHEST

“**S**AY,” exclaimed George, “where do you suppose they came from?”

“Somebody dropped them here, I suppose,” said Grant dryly.

“Of course,” said George, ignoring his friend’s sarcasm, “but who was it? It must have been a long time ago though. See how that pistol is all rusted and eaten away. I don’t believe they’ve used that kind of a pistol in two hundred years, either.”

“Well, John said this island looked like a good one for pirates,” remarked Fred. “Maybe pirates left these things here.”

“Do you suppose so?” exclaimed George eagerly. “If there were pirates here do you think they could have buried any treasure on the island?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” laughed Grant. “Even if they did, I don’t see just how it would do us any good.”

“Can’t we look for it?” demanded George.

“Where shall we look?”

"Maybe they left directions as to where it was buried."

"Say," exclaimed John, "speaking of directions, what happened to that code we were looking at on board the *Josephine*? I suppose it burned up with the ship."

"Oh, no it didn't," said Grant. "It went right into my hip pocket and that's where it has been ever since and where it is right now."

"Why don't you decipher it, Grant?" said Fred.

"Oh, yes," said Grant grimly, "why don't I? It's so easy you know."

"Well, it can be done," insisted Fred firmly.

"Of course it can," laughed George. "The only trouble is we don't know how."

"We don't even know it is a code," said Grant.

"Petersen said it was," Fred objected.

"I know it," said Grant, "but he wasn't sure of it. That was only his opinion."

"Didn't the water and everything hurt it?" asked George.

"Not a bit. Here it is; you can see for yourself," and Grant produced the piece of parchment from his pocket. He unfolded it while his three companions crowded eagerly around him to inspect the strange document once again. No light was thrown on its secret, if it had one, however, and the same baffling maze of numbers confronted the boys.

"Put it away," cried John impatiently. "I think it's a combination to a safe."

"No, it isn't either," said Fred. "It's a code I tell you and I think that some one of us ought to be able to read it."

"What good would it do if you did?" demanded John. "Certainly it can't apply to this island, and I say we forget it and inspect this cave now. That is much more to the point."

"Put it away, Grant," said Fred. "To-morrow though, I'm going to get to work on it and see if I can't make something out of it."

"I'll help you," said Grant.

"That's the way," cried Fred enthusiastically. "Grant and I will find the money and Pop and String won't get a cent."

"Is that so?" exclaimed George. "Well, if you can find any money and not give me my share you're a much better man than I think you are."

"Let's not fight about the money just now," advised Grant. "We haven't found it yet, you know."

"I know it," exclaimed John. "I never heard such a lot of crazy talk before either. Who's coming into the cave?"

The entrance was about ten feet wide and was high enough so that even John could walk in without stooping. Far down towards the back of the cave a patch of light shone on the floor showing

that somewhere else besides the spot where the boys stood, there was an opening.

"I can't see very well," said Fred as they stepped into the cave.

"Neither can I," George agreed. "I'm not very anxious to go walking around in strange dark caves either."

"What can hurt you?" demanded John. "There isn't another soul on the island besides ourselves and Sam."

"That may be," admitted George. "Still there may be holes in the floor or some kind of animals living here."

"Well, I'm going down to where that spot of light is," said John. "Is any one coming with me?"

"Oh, I'll go all right," exclaimed George quickly. "All I said was that I didn't like it much."

"Go slow," cautioned Grant. "We don't want to run any risks."

"I can see better now than I could," said John who was in the lead. "My eyes are becoming more used to the dim light."

"So are mine," said Fred. "The floor looks perfectly flat to me too, and I think I see a box or something up ahead there."

"I guess you do," John agreed. "I see something myself."

They proceeded cautiously on their way until they came to the box in question.

"It's a chest," exclaimed John, bending over. "It's iron, too," and he gave it a kick. The clang of the metal echoed and reëchoed through the cave producing a weird sound and sending the shivers coursing up and down the spines of the boys.

"It sounds hollow," said Grant in a low voice.

"I guess it is," John agreed.

"Lift it and see," directed George. "Aren't there any handles on it?"

John felt around the sides of the chest and finally discovered that there was a handle on one end. He pulled and lifted with all his might, but not one inch could he budge it.

"Whew, there must be something in it," he panted. "It's certainly heavy enough."

"It's probably full of gold," exclaimed George excitedly. "Gold is awfully heavy."

"Calm yourself, Pop," said Grant, but he too, was excited. In fact, the strange cave and the chest suggested all sorts of things to the four youths. What if they should find that the chest was full of money? Stranger things than that have happened.

"It certainly sounded hollow in spite of all you say," remarked Fred. "See if all four of us can't get hold and move it." He kicked it once

more and again the weird sound rang through the cave.

"Don't do that, Fred," begged George. "It gives me the shivers."

"Get hold here then," exclaimed Fred.

The combined efforts of the four boys did not even slightly move the great chest. It was an awkward thing to handle, however, as well as very heavy.

"Perhaps it is empty after all," remarked Grant, as they all paused to regain their breath. "A chest as big as that would weigh a lot all alone."

"Maybe," admitted Fred. "At any rate I say we get it out on the ledge in front there where we can have a good look at it."

"That's the idea," exclaimed George. "We can get it there if we all help. Everybody get to work here now!"

Pushing and hauling, grunting and groaning the young castaways bent to their task. Little by little the great iron chest was moved closer and closer to the entrance of the cave. The sweat poured from the boys in streams and their arms and their backs ached. They would not give up, however. The lure of treasure had them in its grasp and they were determined to find out just what the contents of this chest were if such a thing were possible.

"Just a little more," urged Grant, and with one final effort the chest was pushed out onto the ledge of rock in front of the cave.

For a few moments the boys were too exhausted to do more than stand around puffing and gasping for breath. Such a task, combined with the heat of the tropics, would tax the strength and endurance of the hardiest.

"Now let's open it up," exclaimed Fred. "Where's the top?"

"It's over on its side," said Grant. "Here's the top and it's padlocked."

"So it is," said Fred disappointedly. "What can we do?"

"Get a rock," directed Grant. "It's pretty well rusted and by hammering it we may be able to break it."

A suitable rock was quickly found and an attack begun on the padlock. Grant pounded away for dear life, while the others stood around and watched him. After a few moments he stopped to inspect the result of his efforts.

"Think you can do it?" inquired John.

"I don't know," said Grant. "I think I made a little impression on it, but it'll take some time."

"Well, I'm going back into the cave," announced John. "I'm going to inspect that patch of light back there. When you get the box open, yell at me."

He disappeared in the dusk of the cave while his three companions took turns at hammering the lock. It was stubborn, but was beginning to show some signs of yielding and the boys stuck manfully to their task. They seemed to be on the verge of succeeding when a great commotion inside the cave suddenly arrested their attention.

A moment later John burst forth. His face was ashen and his eyes bulged wide with fear. His hands shook as if he had the ague and his breath was almost gone.

“What is it, John?” demanded Grant in alarm, while Fred and George also crowded around the frightened boy. He had evidently received a terrible shock of some kind and his three companions were greatly affected by his appearance.

“What’s the matter?” exclaimed Grant anxiously, but all that John could do was to mumble incoherently and point towards the interior of the cave.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ODD DISCOVERY

“**J**OHN!” begged Grant. “Tell us what’s the matter.”

John, however, was in no condition to say anything. He shivered and shook, and kept glancing fearfully at the entrance to the cave as though he expected some great ogre or dragon to emerge any moment.

“Watch that cave, Pop,” directed Grant. “Perhaps we’d better get out of here.”

“Can’t you talk, John?” exclaimed Fred. “Tell us what the trouble is.”

John gulped and swallowed hard a couple of times. He pointed towards the cave and his lips moved, but no sound that resembled a word came from his ashen-colored lips.

“Come on, John,” coaxed Fred. “You’re all right. Tell us about it.”

John made another great effort. “That man,” he managed to gasp.

“‘Man’!” cried Grant. “What man?”

“I saw a man,” said John and then he fainted.

“This is a mess,” exclaimed Grant in dismay. “What shall we do?”

"He saw a man," said Fred in alarm. "Who could it be?"

"How do I know?" said Grant testily. "Are you watching that cave, Pop?"

"I certainly am. Hand me one of those rocks."

The three boys stood on the narrow ledge of rocks in a quandary as to what course they should pursue. Below them was the steep, rocky incline of the hill and behind them was the cave containing they knew not what. At their feet lay their comrade, unconscious and helpless. It was a situation that would have worried the oldest and most hardened adventurer.

"We've got to get John away from here," said Grant at last.

"We can't do it," objected Fred. "We can't carry him down this hill."

"But suppose we're attacked," said Grant dolefully.

"We'll have to run that risk."

"I'm going into the cave," George announced suddenly.

"Pop!" cried Grant in alarm. "You stay where you are."

"Why not go in and clear up the mystery right now?" said George. "We might just as well."

"You're crazy," exclaimed Fred. "Don't think of such a thing."

"Nothing hurt John," said George soberly.

"Yes," cried Grant, "but look at him now. He was scared almost to death!"

The three boys gazed apprehensively at the entrance of the cave. They all had rocks in their hands now and were ready to let them fly the moment the man John had seen should show his head. Nothing appeared, however.

After a moment John stirred and opened his eyes. He looked about him in a puzzled way as though he did not know where he was. Then he evidently remembered his experience for he shuddered and cast a terror-stricken glance at the dark entrance of the cave.

"I saw a man," he repeated in a low voice.

"What kind of a man? Who was it?" demanded Grant eagerly. "Keep your eye on that cave, Pop," he added grimly.

"Tell us what happened," urged Fred.

John was much more composed now and had better control of himself.

"I went into the cave," he began. "I walked along and didn't see a thing. I was beginning to think that that chest was the only thing there and I kept thinking what a strange thing it was. I had gone in to find out where that patch of light came from you know, so when I came to it I looked up." John stopped speaking.

"What then?" demanded Grant in a tense voice.

"I saw a man," said John, and he shivered violently.

"Yes," urged Grant. "What kind of a man did you see?"

"An old man with white hair and a long white beard."

"What did he do?"

"He was looking in the other end of the opening. I just took one look at him and ran."

"Did he see you?"

"I don't know. I didn't wait for anything."

"Was he alone?"

"I think so," said John. "At least I saw only one. I suppose I am a coward to be so frightened by an old man like that, but it was so unexpected. The opening was narrow like a chimney-flue and it gave me such a start to see some one at the other end."

"Well, I don't blame you," said Grant grimly. "It would have scared me too."

John scrambled to his feet. "Let's go back in and see if he's still there. I'm ashamed of the way I acted and I want to make up for it."

"That's what I say," exclaimed George. "Clear up this business. One old man can't hurt us very much."

"Unless he has a gun," said Fred.

"That's true," agreed George. "I never thought of that."

“Not much chance of his having a gun, I guess,” said Grant. “I’ll risk it anyway if the rest will.”

“Maybe it was Sam you saw,” said Fred suddenly.

“With white hair and a white beard? I guess not,” laughed George grimly.

“He might have been playing a joke on us,” suggested Fred.

“If he was, he’ll never live to tell the tale,” cried John fiercely.

“If that fellow was looking through the top of that opening, he won’t be in the cave,” said Grant suddenly. “Why don’t we look for him on top of the hill?”

“That’s true,” agreed George. “Can we get up from here?”

The four boys looked up to see what kind of a climb it would be. Suddenly, Fred burst out laughing. His companions turned and looked at him in amazement. He laughed and laughed until the tears came to his eyes.

“What’s struck you, Fred?” demanded George angrily.

“Oh, John,” gasped Fred, when he could get his breath. “You poor simpleton.”

“What are you talking about?” exclaimed John in surprise.

“Did you see an old man with white hair and a long beard?”

"Of course I did. That's what I said, didn't I?"

"Well, there he is," and once more Fred became convulsed with merriment.

His three companions looked in the direction he had indicated. At the brow of the hill, alongside a large rock, and gazing curiously down at them stood an old billy goat. His white beard gave him a most odd appearance.

"Is that the old man you saw?" demanded Grant, turning toward John. One glance at his companion, however, was enough to give him his answer. A foolish expression spread itself over John's face and he became very red and embarrassed. He mumbled something under his breath, but no one could make out what it was that he said.

"Well, String," cried George, "you certainly put your foot in it that time. I guess you'll never hear the end of it either. You surely won't if I have anything to say about it. An old man with a white beard. Baa!" and George imitated a goat and he too gave vent to uncontrollable laughter.

"There was a goat at each end of the opening, wasn't there, Pop?" inquired Grant mischievously.

"There sure was," George agreed. "The big one was at the bottom."

Fred, Grant, and George laughed and then laughed some more. They slapped John on the

back and twitted him repeatedly about the false alarm he had given. They enjoyed themselves immensely at their friend's expense. He, however, was very much ashamed and very unhappy.

"I admit I was the goat," he said sadly. "I don't know what got into me, but it was such a shock to see that funny looking face staring in at the other end of that opening. It scared the life out of me."

"I should say it did," chuckled George. "You scared us, too."

"Well, I'm sorry," John apologized. "I'll do anything I can to make up."

"What shall we have him do?" exclaimed Fred eagerly. "It ought to be something pretty bad."

"Make him open that chest," Grant suggested.

"That's a good scheme," said George. "Here's a big rock for you, String. Hit it a few cracks and see if you are better at this than at exploring caves."

John approached the chest, rock in hand. The lock had already been bent considerably by the other boys' efforts, but it still held fast. John attacked it fiercely and after breaking several stones succeeded in demolishing the lock.

"Yea, String!" cried George, excitedly. "You're a wonder. Open it up! Quick!"

The padlock was removed and all four boys

crowded around and eagerly grasped the top. It was not so easy to open, however, but finally it was done. Every boy's eyes glistened expectantly as the top was raised. The least they expected to see was a great pile of gold, but no such sight presented itself.

"It's empty," cried Grant. His voice sounded as if he had lost his last friend on earth.

"There's a piece of paper in there," corrected Fred. "Let's see if that says anything."

Keen disappointment showed on the face of every boy. Their hopes had been dashed. There was no special reason why they should have expected to find such a treasure-chest as they had pictured this one to be, but this idea had fixed itself in their minds and they really counted on all being made rich the moment they opened it up.

"What does the paper say, Fred?" inquired Grant listlessly. Most of his interest had faded.

"I don't know," said Fred carelessly. "It's nothing but a bunch of mixed up numbers. Say," he exclaimed suddenly. "Let me see that code in your pocket."

"What do you want that for?" inquired Grant curiously, at the same time producing the article in question and handing it over to Fred.

Fred grasped it and quickly spread it open. Holding the one he had found in the chest alongside the other he ran his eye hurriedly over the

two. Then he turned to his three companions, who were watching him curiously.

“Do you know that these two papers are exactly alike?” he demanded excitedly.

CHAPTER XV

SAM REMEMBERS SOMETHING

“**A** LIKE?” cried Grant in amazement.
“What do you mean?”
“Just what I said,” returned Fred.
“The numbers on these two papers are exactly the same from start to finish.”

“That’s the strangest thing I ever heard of in my life,” exclaimed Grant. “Let me look at them.”

“Didn’t I tell you fellows that that piece of parchment Petersen had was a code of some sort?” demanded Fred.

“Does the fact that we found one like it prove that?” said George skeptically.

“It certainly seems so to me,” Fred exclaimed.
“At any rate, it is a very odd coincidence.”

“It’s that all right,” admitted George. “Are they exactly alike, Grant?”

“They seem to be,” replied Grant, who had been carefully studying the two papers.

“We can soon find out, anyway,” said John.
“Let me have one of them and I’ll read it aloud. One of you fellows can watch the other and check up the numbers.”

"That's a good scheme," Grant agreed. "Here, String, you take this one and I'll keep my eye on the numbers on the other as you call them off."

"All ready?" said John.

"Go ahead," and this is what John read:

"20 - 1 - 11 - 5 - 1 - 3 - 15 - 21 - 18 - 19 - 5 - 4 -
21 - 5 - 14 - 15 - 18 - 20 - 8 - 15 - 14 - 15 - 18 - 21 -
14 - 4 - 18 - 5 - 4 - 6 - 5 - 5 - 20 - 6 - 18 - 15 - 13 -
20 - 8 - 5 - 19 - 15 - 21 - 20 - 8 - 5 - 18 - 14 - 5 -
24 - 20 - 18 - 5 - 13 - 9 - 20 - 25 - 15 - 6 - 19 - 8 -
1 - 18 - 11 - 18 - 15 - 3 - 11 - 20 - 8 - 5 - 14 - 5 - 1 -
19 - 20 - 6 - 9 - 6 - 20 - 25 - 6 - 20 - 25 - 6 - 5 -
5 - 20 - 1 - 14 - 4 - 14 - 15 - 18 - 20 - 8 - 2 - 25 -
5 - 1 - 19 - 20 - 20 - 8 - 9 - 18 - 20 - 25 - 20 - 8 -
18 - 5 - 5 - 4 - 9 - 7."

"Exactly the same," announced Grant when John had finished. "Now what do you think about that?"

"I believe it's a code which tells where some pirates have buried treasure," announced Fred decidedly. "I also believe that this is the island where it was done. How else do you account for our finding that duplicate in the chest here?"

"It's strange all right," said George. "I can explain it all in a different way, though."

"What's that?" asked Grant curiously.

"Just this. Suppose all those numbers do make up a code and that they do give the key to some

treasure or something. Isn't it possible that the treasure was once in this empty chest, and some one found it and took it away? Evidently there were at least two people in the secret, as the two codes show. One of them got here first and took it away and as long as he had no more use for the code he left it. Doesn't that sound reasonable?"

"Yes, it does," Fred admitted. "It's not very cheerful, though, and I hope you are wrong about it."

"I hope so, too," exclaimed George heartily. "It's just as well to look at both sides, though."

"I don't believe your idea is right, Pop," said Grant.

"Why not?"

"Petersen got this code from his father, didn't he? Well, if his father and the men he was with buried that treasure on this island it seems strange that this old powder-horn and flint-lock pistol should be here. Such things as that were used a good many years before Petersen's father was alive."

"Who said his father was the one who buried the treasure?"

"I thought that was what some one said back there on the *Josephine*."

"No, indeed. They said Petersen's father had the code, but I never heard that he was one of

those who were supposed to have buried the treasure.”

“At any rate,” put in George, “no matter who buried it, it doesn’t say that my theory is wrong. The pistol and the powder-horn may have been in the chest along with the treasure. Whoever found it thought they weren’t worth taking, so they were just thrown to one side.”

“Why was the chest locked again?” asked John.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” laughed Grant. “I give up.”

“Not at all,” exclaimed Fred. “Don’t say that. We can at least try to make out this code. That will give us something to do and I guess we are going to have plenty of time on our hands before we get away from here.” As he finished speaking he turned to scan the horizon, but nothing was in sight save the endless expanse of ocean. As far as appearances went they might have been alone in the world. The occasional note of a bird and the soft murmur of the waves as they caressed the beach below were the only sounds to be heard.

“Yes, I guess we will,” said Grant. “As you say, we can at least try to decipher it.”

“I’m no good at such things,” exclaimed George. “I don’t believe I ever worked out a puzzle in all my life.”

“That doesn’t say you can’t do this, though, does it?” demanded Grant.

"Oh, no. Perhaps I'll get an idea some day and work the whole thing out for you."

"I have an idea right now," said John.

"Better tell us what it is, quick," urged George.

"You may lose it."

"I am not like some other people I know," said John loftily.

To this remark George made no intelligible answer, though he muttered something under his breath. "I'm glad of it," was what two of his companions made out his reply to be.

"What's your idea, String?" asked Grant.

"I say to take possession of this cave and live here."

"That's a good scheme," exclaimed Fred heartily. "Let's go and get our few belongings just as soon as we can and bring them up here."

"A fine idea," agreed George. "String, I didn't think you knew so much."

"That proves that you know very little yourself, then," replied John scornfully.

"Ha, ha. Good one, String," cried Fred laughingly. "Give him another."

"He is not worth bothering about," said John. "Let's get our things."

Down the side of the hill they scrambled, slipping and sliding down the steep decline. They came to the bottom in safety, however, and it was

not long before they reached the spot where the baggage had been left.

"Where's Sam?" exclaimed Grant. "He certainly can't be sleeping still."

"There he is," said Fred, pointing down the beach.

"What's he got in his hand?" said George curiously. "It looks like a knife."

"Where could he get a knife?" exclaimed John. "Just as I told you a few minutes ago, Pop, you've certainly got something missing in that head of yours."

"I thought maybe he'd gone around to the hardware store and bought it," drawled George soberly with a wink at Grant. He loved to stir up his companions, and none of them more so than his tall friend, John, who almost invariably rose to any bait he might happen to offer.

"What have you got there, Sam?" called Fred when the negro was within earshot.

Sam merely grinned and waved the object he held in his hand to the boys.

"As I said before it certainly looks like a knife," murmured George.

"What is that, Sam?" asked Fred again when Sam had come up to the spot where the four boys were standing.

"Ah's makin' a knife," said Sam proudly.

"Where did you get the steel?"

"Dat ain't steel," grinned Sam. "Dat am one o' dem iron hoops off o' dat dere bar'el o' water. Ah is gwine sharpen her up and den we'll hab a sho' nuff knife."

"I'm afraid it'll never cut much," laughed John. "No knife with a blade made of iron is apt to be much good. It'll be all right to dig holes in the ground with, though."

"Wait 'til she's sharpened," warned Sam.

"How are you going to sharpen it?" asked Grant curiously.

"On a big black rock Ah done discovah roun' dat dere point."

"The rock that looks like a shark," exclaimed George. "That ought to be a good one, for it certainly seemed hard enough."

"Dat rock look lak a shark, yo' say?" remarked Sam suddenly.

"Yes," said George. "Didn't you think so?"

"Now dat Ah comes to think on it, it sho' did," said Sam. "Ah wondahs if dis yere can be de island."

"What do you mean?" demanded Fred eagerly. "What island?"

"Well," said Sam, "evah sence Ah done commence to foller de sea Ah has heard tales of some island where dey is treasah buried. Dat island was said to hab a big rock on it what done look lak a shark. Mebbe this am de one."

"Where was this island?" asked George eagerly.

"No one ebber knew," said Sam. "All Ah knows is dat on dis island dey said dere was all so'ts ob treasah. Yo' could tell de pahtikelah island by its habbin' a big rock on it what done look lak a shark. Dat's all Ah knows."

"Did you ever meet any one who had seen the island?" inquired Grant.

"Nebber," replied Sam. "Some say dat de island done disapeah or dat de ocean had swallowed 'er up. Dese was all stories Ah heard."

"Well!" exclaimed Fred, his eyes shining with excitement. "I certainly am in favor of finding out what those codes mean. Perhaps we'll find something on this island after all. I'll bet this is the one Sam has heard about all right."

"Seems so, doesn't it?" agreed Grant. "We may get rich yet."

"The treasure was in that chest up there in the cave, I tell you," said George. "Some one has been here and taken it away."

"Not at all," cried Fred. "At any rate there's more of it here. Didn't you hear Sam say that he has heard about this island for years and years?"

"You're not sure this is the one."

"Well, I'm pretty sure there aren't two islands with rocks on them like that," exclaimed Fred. "A rock shaped just like a shark is so unusual that you see they identify the island by it."

"But why has no one ever found it?"

"You just said they had," Grant reminded him. "You also said that the treasure was gone. You are contradicting yourself."

"Well, you'd think some one would find it," exclaimed George. "An island as big as this one couldn't very well be overlooked if any one came near it at all."

"Apparently no one does come near it," said Fred. "How many boats have we seen since the *Josephine* burned?"

"Not one," said Grant.

"Why is it?" demanded Fred. "In this day and age, when the ocean is so covered with ships, you'd certainly think we'd see at least one."

"We never even saw any of the other life-boats," said John.

"That's true," Fred exclaimed. "How do you account for it?"

"I don't," said Grant. "It's a strange thing all around."

"Well, if we're going to be stranded here for a few years we might just as well spend part of the time looking for the treasure," said Fred. "Everything seems to point to the fact that there is some here. That cave and the chest and the two codes and the queer rock that fits in so well with what Sam has heard, everything about it sounds like treasure and lots of it."

"If we could only be the ones to find it," sighed John. "Just think of going home rich; rich with pearls and diamonds and emeralds and gold doubloons and bars of gold all dug up from some old pirate's hiding place. If we only could!"

"Perhaps we can," exclaimed Fred, much thrilled by John's description of the wealth that might be theirs. "My opinion is that we must translate those codes first, though. Wouldn't it be awful if they didn't apply to this island after all."

"But they do," insisted Grant. "I know they do."

"And I think so, too," exclaimed John. "Let's go to work."

CHAPTER XVI

THE RIDDLE

DAYS passed and weeks rolled by. The four friends and their colored companion still remained on the mysterious island. The flag still flew from the hill and all day long one or another of the boys kept a lookout from a spot near by. No boat came to rescue them, however, and the little party of castaways had almost come to believe that the rest of their days were to be spent on this little island somewhere in an unknown sea.

Once John on watch had seen smoke. Far off on the horizon appeared a smudge from the funnels of some passing steamer. It was too far away however to discover their signal or even to see their island. He had watched it hopefully until it finally disappeared over the rim of the ocean. That was the only sign of a vessel that had been sighted so far.

However, the boys were not in want. Their clothes were becoming ragged and their hair unkempt, but they were well fed and healthy. If it had not been for the fact that they knew they could not leave they might have been measurably con-

tented. They were now living in the cave as snug and comfortable as could be desired. The fact that they were short of clothes did not bother them, either, for the weather was warm and clothes were more of a burden than a necessity.

As yet they had discovered no treasure. Hour after hour they had puzzled over the mysterious numbers on the parchment, but as yet no one had been able to solve their riddle.

"It makes me mad," said John one day. "I sit and stare at those crazy figures until it seems as if I must go crazy myself. I never get even a clew as to what they mean, but at the same time the more I study them the more sure I am that they have a meaning."

"And I, too," agreed Grant. "I know they mean something. I'm sure of it."

"Until we discover what it is we are practically helpless," said John. "We can't dig up the whole island looking for buried gold, you know. We must have directions."

"I certainly would laugh," exclaimed George, "if some one did find out what those figures mean and then we discovered that it didn't apply to this island at all."

"What would be so funny in that?" demanded Fred.

"Think how you'd all be fooled."

"Yes, and you'd be just as badly off as any of

us," said Fred. "If we don't find any money, you won't get anything any more than we will."

"Maybe he doesn't like money," said John. "He seems sort of hopeful that we won't find any."

"You've got to prove to me that you are going to find any first," said George. "A set of funny looking numbers and a queer looking rock that Sam says he remembers hearing about and a cave with an empty chest in it doesn't necessarily mean money, in my opinion."

"Dey does in mine," exclaimed Sam, rolling his eyes rapturously towards heaven. "Ef we only could find dat treasah Ah sho' would show dem fresh coons back dar in Richmond a thing or two. Oh, Lawdy!" and Sam executed a few steps of a clog dance just to show his delight at the mere thought.

"What would you do if you had a lot of money, Sam?" asked Grant smilingly.

"Well," began the enthusiastic ducky, "de berry fust thing dat Ah would do would be to buy mahself de grandes' lookin' suit ob clothes yo' ebber did see."

"What kind of a suit?" inquired Grant.

"A checked suit," said Sam. "A checked suit wif black an' white checks as big as a postage stamp. Den Ah would get mahself some ob dem dare patent leather shoes. Den," and Sam drew

in his breath luxuriously, "Ah would purchase a bran' span red necktie an' square in de middle ob dat Ah would place de bigges' an' de grandes' diamond' ho'shoe yo' ebber set yo' eyes upon."

"Is that all you'd buy?" laughed George.

Sam gave him a scornful look. "No, indeedy," he maintained stoutly. "Nex' Ah would buy one o' dem high shiny hats and den a cane, den a pair of dem yaller gloves, an' say, mebbe dem niggahs back home wouldn' be jealous ob Samuel."

"I guess they would, all right," exclaimed Grant, much entertained by Sam's description of the way he would spend his money. "Wouldn't you buy anything but clothes, though?"

"Ob co'se Ah would," said Sam. "Not at de fust, though. Ah'd jest get mah new clothes on an' den walk down de street so't ob cahless like an' in two minutes yo' gwine see ebbery wench in town jes' a follerin' me. Oh, say, golly, mebbe dem niggahs wouldn't be jealous!" and Sam laughed aloud, the thought was so pleasant for him to contemplate."

"Well, I hope you get it, Sam," said Fred heartily. "If you get it we all do."

"Except Pop," added Fred.

"Why not me?" demanded George in an aggrieved tone. "Why don't I get any?"

"Because you don't think there's anything here worth taking," said Fred. "You keep making

fun of us all the time and telling us there is no treasure on the island. If you aren't interested enough to do some work it seems only natural that you won't want any of the treasure."

"Why, you little shrimp," exclaimed George, pretending to be very angry and glowering down upon his stubby companion, "don't you know that I have been joshing you fellows all this time? If there's anything here worth working for you can be dead sure I'm willing to do my share. All I say is that you prove it to me first."

"Why should we prove it to you?" inquired Grant. "Why don't you get to work and help us prove it to ourselves? After we have found where the stuff is any one can go and get it. What we want to know is the spot where it's hidden."

"Quite true," George admitted. "At the same time you must admit that you are all taking a great deal for granted. You seem to think that there is no doubt about there being treasure on the island and also that this code when deciphered will tell you just where it is."

"We hope that's the case," said Grant. "Of course we can't tell until we've found out what the code says. That's what we're trying to do now."

"You're right," agreed George. "We must get to work on it at once."

"We've been at work on it ever since we struck

this island," said Fred warmly. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Well, when I get down to business we'll soon solve the riddle," said George pompously. "I'll soon get an idea."

"Hit him, Grant," cried John. "You're nearest to him and we ought not to let such things live."

George burst out laughing. "Forget those old numbers for a while," he advised. "So far no one has been able to do anything with them, but if we let them alone for a few days we can go back to them with our minds fresh. Who knows, somebody might get an idea all of a sudden that would solve the whole business."

"I wish somebody would," sighed Fred.

"Think of this, though," exclaimed Grant. "Suppose we do forget it all for a few days, as Pop suggests. In the meantime a boat might come along and take us away and our chance of ever finding the treasure would be gone."

"That's right, Grant," cried John. "We don't want to lose an opportunity like this."

"Can't we take the code home with us?" said George. "We have all the rest of our lives to find out what it means and if it is worth while we can always come back."

"How can we tell whether it is worth while or not until we see it?" asked Fred.

“Probably that code contains a description of what it is.”

“Perhaps it does,” said Grant. “We’ll know better when we find out just what it does say. I’m in favor of keeping right at it.”

“So am I, Grant,” exclaimed John. “Don’t let it rest for a second.”

“Dat’s de boy!” cried Sam heartily. “Ah get dat diamon’ ho’shoe yet.”

“Yes, and I hope you get a big automobile to go with it, Sam,” said Grant.

“Ah hopes so mahself,” grinned Sam. “Say, wouldn’t dat be gran’?”

“We’ll all have them,” said John. “We’ll have motor-boats and yachts, too, and maybe flying-machines.”

“Stick a pin in that fellow, Fred,” urged George. “He’s asleep.”

“Is that so?” exclaimed John. “At any rate, it’s cheap enough to dream.”

“That’s true,” laughed George. “Go ahead and dream if you like.”

“Some one of us ought to be able to read that code,” said Grant. “Why should a lot of figures get the better of us? We ought not to let them.”

“Maybe the numbers mean letters,” George suggested.

“We’ve all thought that ourselves,” said Grant grimly. “Just what letters, though?”

"Let me see the thing," exclaimed George. "What number occurs oftenest?"

"I don't know," mused Grant, looking over his shoulder. "I guess five does."

"All right then," said George quickly; "now what is the commonest letter in the alphabet?"

"I thought of that, too," said Grant. "The trouble is that none of us know."

"That might be an idea, though."

"Yes," admitted John, "but if we don't know those things I don't see how we can get very far."

"Nor I," said George. "We might try some experiments, though."

"Go ahead," urged Grant. "Try everything you can think of. We've nothing to lose and everything to gain. No matter how silly an idea may seem to you, try it. That's the only way we can ever get anywhere."

"Right you are, Grant!" exclaimed Fred. "That's the way to talk. If we stick to it, I know we'll find out all about it some day."

"Perhaps we will 'some day,'" said George mournfully.

CHAPTER XVII

UNDERGROUND WORK

ONE day John was standing at the back of the cave looking up through the opening which was there. Here it was that the billy goat had given him such a fright a few weeks before. This time, however, he did not see any "white bearded old man" as he gazed up into the aperture, but he did spy something almost equally interesting.

"Hey, Fred!" he called. "Come here a minute."

Fred hastened to respond to his friend's summons and soon reached the spot where John was standing.

"What do you want, String?" he inquired.

"Look up through that opening."

"All right," said Fred, doing as he had been directed. "I'm looking."

"Don't you see anything?"

"Sure I do. I see the sky."

"Don't be silly, Fred," exclaimed John. "In the opening, I mean."

"I see dirt."

"Is that all?"

"Absolutely. What are you trying to do, anyway?"

"About three feet this side of the other end; don't you see something sticking out?"

Fred squinted one eye and peered upward critically.

"Don't you see a thing?" demanded John eagerly.

"Maybe I do," replied Fred. "Is something sticking out up there?"

"That's just what I thought. What is it?"

"It looks like the end of a box."

"Just what I thought myself," exclaimed John triumphantly. "Let's get it."

"We can't reach it from this end."

"I know it. We'll have to climb up on top of the hill."

"Come on," urged Fred, now also keenly excited.

Outside the cave, Grant sat puzzling over the numbers. Most of his time he now spent in this way, and though he was apparently no nearer a solution than when he had started, his determination was stronger than ever.

"Where are you two fellows going?" he demanded as John and Fred rushed past the spot where he was seated.

"Just up on top of the hill," said John evasively. He and Fred had decided not to tell any of

the others of their discovery until they had investigated it thoroughly themselves.

"You seem to be in an awful hurry," remarked Grant. "What's up?"

"Tell you later," answered John, and they quickly passed out of Grant's sight. A moment more and they had arrived at the top of the opening which led down into the cave.

"I can't see anything from here," exclaimed John, after a hasty examination. "The shadow of my head gets right in the way and I can't see a thing."

"Let me look," urged Fred, but he could make out nothing either.

"I tell you what to do," he exclaimed a moment later. "Hang onto my feet so I won't fall and get wedged in there, and then lower me into the hole."

"That's a good scheme," said John eagerly. "You're little and skinny and ought to be able to get in there all right."

"Never mind the 'little and skinny' part," said Fred shortly. "You hold onto my feet."

Anyone who might have passed by that way and seen John holding fast to a pair of legs sticking out of a hole in the ground would have been puzzled as to what was taking place. Grant's curiosity had been aroused by the strange actions of his two friends and he had followed them. Imagine his surprise to see what John and Fred

were doing, but he said nothing. He stood quietly near by and neither of his comrades was aware of his presence.

"Can you see anything, Fred?" called John.

"Not a thing," came back the muffled reply. "I can feel something, though."

"Is it a box?"

"I can't tell, I think it is."

"Can you move it?"

"I should say not. It's stuck fast."

"What do you want to do?"

"Pull me out and I'll tell you."

A moment later Fred emerged, his face covered with dirt.

"What are you two doing?" demanded Grant, who now approached the two conspirators. "You look as though you were training to be a mole, Fred."

"There's a box down in there," said Fred. "We want to get it out."

"A box!" exclaimed Grant. "How big is it?"

"I could only feel one end of it. It's about a foot wide I should say. I don't know how long it is for all the rest of it is buried in there."

"Couldn't you budge it?"

"Not an inch. We'll have to dig it out."

"I'll get that knife Sam made," exclaimed John. "That'll be just the thing."

"Sam's up by the flag on watch," Grant called

as John started off. "I think he has the knife with him. Who discovered the box?" he inquired, turning to Fred. Grant was now as excited as the other two boys had been.

"John did," said Fred.

"How did he happen to do it?"

"Oh, he was looking up from the bottom and just happened to see it. He showed it to me and we came up to investigate."

"Maybe this one has the real stuff in it," said Grant excitedly.

"Maybe so," Fred agreed. "All I hope is that we can dig it out."

"I guess we can," said Grant confidently. "Here comes String now."

John came running up, out of breath, and handed the knife to Fred. "I told Sam we had discovered a box," he panted. "Sam says that if there are any diamond horseshoes in it they belong to him. That's the only condition on which he would let me have the knife."

"All right," laughed Fred. "Sam gets all the horseshoes."

"Are you going to do the digging, Fred?" asked John.

"I guess I'd better. Let me have the knife."

Holding the home-made blade in his right hand he was once again lowered into the tunnel. John and Grant each held fast to one leg. It was hard

work for Fred for he was in comparative darkness and was compelled to feel around to discover where to dig. It was practically impossible for him to see anything.

"How's it coming?" called John after a few moments had elapsed.

"All right," replied Fred, his voice sounding as if it came from the center of the earth. "I'm spilling a lot of dirt down into the cave though."

"Never mind that, as long as you don't lose any of the money."

"Do you really think there's any gold or anything in that box?" said Grant.

"I'm sure I don't know," John replied. "If Pop were here he'd be sure it was empty."

"I know it. Isn't he a regular old gloom lately?"

"He's not usually that way. At least he never used to be."

"Something has come over him since we started work on that code. He thinks it's very silly and that we are foolish to bother with it."

"We'll surprise him one of these days," said John confidently.

"I certainly hope so," exclaimed Grant.

While Fred dug they chatted and talked of the possibilities of their finding some long forgotten pirate's treasure and making themselves rich and

famous. Almost anyone would have been as thrilled as these boys were under the same circumstances. Petersen's tale on board the *Josephine* and the strange code he had had; the finding of a similar one in the cave; the chest and the powder-horn and pistol; the queer black rock and Sam's story in connection with it; all these events had combined to spur the four young adventurers on in their quest. Now they had discovered another odd looking box and with the hope that springs eternal in the human breast they were anxiously and eagerly awaiting a chance to examine its contents.

"All right. Pull me up," came Fred's summons at last.

Slowly and carefully John and Grant lifted their companion out of the hole. Soon he emerged, the knife in one hand, the box in the other and with so much dirt and grime that its owner was scarcely recognizable.

"You look like Sam," remarked John, hardly able to restrain his mirth at Fred's appearance.

"Open the box and don't get so personal," advised Fred, wiping the dirt from his eyes.

Grant was already busily engaged in examining the prize his friend had dug from its place in the earth. "This one is light," he remarked. "I don't suppose there is anything in it at all."

"Can you open it?" demanded John.

"Easily. There's only a catch on it," and Grant straightway lifted the cover.

"An envelope," exclaimed Fred disappointedly. "All that work for nothing."

Grant, however, was opening the envelope and as he did so two gold pieces rolled out upon the ground. "Empty is it?" he cried. "How about those?"

"Say," exclaimed John excitedly. "Just look at them. Are there any more?"

"Just this," said Grant quietly and he spread a sheet of paper before the gaze of his two companions. "Do you recognize it?"

"I should know those figures in China now," said Fred disgustedly. "It's that same old code again."

"I know it," said Grant, "but do you see what's written across the top?"

"Sure enough," exclaimed Fred. "What does it say, anyway?"

" 'This tells where the rest of it is,' " Grant read aloud.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE WATER

JOHN, Fred and Grant sat and looked at one another and at the two gold pieces which lay glittering in John's hand. Then they looked at the third copy of the code which had turned up so strangely.

"I wish Pop were here," remarked Grant grimly.

"Why so?" inquired Fred.

"I'd like him to see those gold pieces and I'd like him to see what is written across the top of this parchment. I think after that he wouldn't be so sure there was no treasure on this island. We'll convince him now quick enough."

"Let me see one of those coins," said Fred.

"What are they, anyhow?"

"Spanish, I should say," replied John.

"They're old ones."

"I should think so," exclaimed Fred. "They're worn, too, and the date is gone from this one."

"This says seventeen something," remarked John, examining the piece of gold which he held

in his hand. "I can't make out the rest of it."

"They must be a couple of hundred years old, all right," said Grant.

"Do you suppose they've been here all that time?"

"I can't tell you, Grant," said John. "I do wish we could decipher that code though. This makes it look better than ever."

"It surely does," Grant agreed heartily. "I've thought of about everything under the sun, but nothing seems to work for a cent. I'd like to catch the fellow who made up that set of figures. He must have been a fiend."

"Not necessarily," laughed Fred. "He was only trying to protect his property."

"Well, I guess he did that all right," exclaimed Grant. "He certainly did as far as I am concerned."

"The joke of it is," said John, "that probably the whole thing is as simple as rolling off a log. All we need is the key."

"Yes," cried Grant, "but if we can't find the key what good does it do us?"

"None, I'll admit," replied John, "but we must find it."

"Oh, it's easy enough to say that," exclaimed Grant bitterly. "I don't notice anybody doing it, though."

"You're not going to give it up are you,

Grant?" asked Fred in surprise. "Why this is the best encouragement we've had yet."

"Give it up! Of course I'm not going to give it up. I don't see much encouragement here though. I think it's only more maddening. What we've found to-day only goes to prove that this code does tell where treasure is buried, but it doesn't tell us how to read the code, does it? It only tantalizes us, but you can make up your mind that I'm not going to give up, even for a second."

"What Pop said was probably true," remarked John.

"What was that?" asked Grant.

"Why, that all of a sudden somebody would get an idea and the whole thing will be solved. I think that's what will happen myself."

"I hope so," exclaimed Grant. "I wish it would be soon, too."

"Maybe Pop already has an idea," laughed Fred.

"I doubt it," said John. "Where is he anyway?"

"He went for a walk."

"Where?"

"I don't know. He just said he was going for a walk."

"Well, let's go down and take a swim," exclaimed Fred. "It's awfully hot and a little water certainly wouldn't hurt me."

"I should say not," laughed John. "I never saw so much dirt on any man's face in all my life. You're a sight."

"I know it," Fred agreed. "Still," he added, "I found a couple of gold pieces, didn't I? And I'm always willing to get dirty under those conditions."

"I guess you are," agreed John. "How much do you suppose they're worth?"

"Well," said Grant, "they look to me about the size of a twenty-dollar gold piece. They ought to be worth thirty-five or forty dollars easily enough."

"Just imagine finding a whole chest full of them," exclaimed Fred, his eyes shining. "Why, we'd never have to do any work as long as we lived."

"We'd soon get tired of doing nothing, I'm afraid," said Grant. "Anyway we haven't found them yet."

"Don't talk about it," exclaimed John. "That code is the most maddening thing I ever saw."

The three boys now were walking down towards the shore. Their favorite spot in which to swim was the little ledge from which they had watched the many colored fish and the various forms of sea-life the first day they had landed on the island. Here the water was deep and the ledge made an excellent place from which to dive.

A few moments later the three friends were puffing and blowing about in the water enjoying themselves immensely. Their bodies from long exposure to the rays of the tropical sun were tanned until they might have been easily mistaken for South Sea islanders or some other natives of the hot climates. Their hair, too, had grown long, for it had been many weeks since they had seen a barber. What few clothes they wore were beginning to hang in rags so that altogether they presented a strange appearance. Any chance visitor to their island might have thought he had run across the remnants of some wild race of savages.

"Well, that was pretty good, I should say," said John luxuriously as he stretched himself out on the rocks alongside his two companions.

"It surely was," agreed Fred. "This is about the best part of it, though."

"What is?"

"Lying out in the sun this way. Doesn't it feel good?"

"It couldn't be better," agreed Grant. "Isn't this a lazy life?"

"It's a good one, though," said John. "Just think, we haven't a thing to worry about. All we have to do is swim and sleep and lie around in the sun."

"I should say we had plenty to worry about," said Fred.

"Getting home, you mean?"

"Yes. We can't stay here all our lives, you know."

"Of course not," John agreed. "We'll be picked up some day though, sure. We can't do anything in the meantime that will help us to leave here, so what's the use in worrying about it? That's the way I feel."

"That's all right, too," exclaimed Fred. "Still, it's a very strange thing that we don't ever see any boats. We may be here for years."

"What if we are? That doesn't make anything to worry about either."

"How about the treasure?" demanded Grant. "Doesn't that worry you?"

"Sometimes it does," admitted John. "I'm principally worried for fear some boat will come along and take us away before we find it."

"Let's all go back to the cave and make another try at that code," exclaimed Grant, springing to his feet.

"I've got to go in that water again before I do anything else," said John. "It certainly is wonderful to-day."

"All right," agreed Fred. "One more dive."

Three bodies flashed through the air and disappeared beneath the water with a resounding splash. A moment later and three heads came to the surface.

"Coming out?" demanded Grant, blowing the water from his nostrils and shaking the hair out of his eyes.

"I think I'll take a little swim," said John. "I'll be out in a minute."

"We'll wait for you," said Fred. "Don't be long."

"I'll be right out," exclaimed John as he struck out with long powerful overhead strokes in the direction of the open sea.

Grant and Fred clambered out upon the little ledge and began to put on the few pieces of clothing that they possessed.

"I certainly do feel fine," exclaimed Fred as he took in a deep breath of the pure air that was blown upon them straight up from the waters of the sea. "The air is fine to-day."

"Well, it ought to be, every day," laughed Grant. "After it has traveled a couple of thousand miles across the water it ought to be pretty nearly pure."

"And have no dust in it," added Fred.

"That's right," said Grant. "Where's John?"

"I don't see him," said Fred, turning to look for his companion. "I hope he didn't try to swim out very far. That's always a fool trick, I think."

"Where is he?" exclaimed Grant, somewhat alarmed at not discovering his friend.

"There he is," cried Fred suddenly.

“Where?”

“Why out there. Don’t you see him?”

“He’s crazy,” said Grant angrily. “Why does he want to go so far out? He can swim just as well along shore and not take half the risk. Suppose anything should happen to him now, we couldn’t help him a bit.”

“Look!” cried Fred suddenly, “there’s a shark.”

“Where?”

“Right behind John. He’s a goner now,” and Fred almost sobbed aloud.

“John! John!” shouted Grant at the top of his voice, but he knew it was hopeless to think of making himself heard at that distance.

“He’s gone. He’s gone,” moaned Fred distractedly.

The great black fin moved steadily along in back of the daring young swimmer. To the boys on the shore it seemed as if it approached nearer with every passing moment. Suddenly there was a great splashing in the immediate vicinity of where John was swimming.

CHAPTER XIX

SHARK

“**I**T’S horrible,” cried Fred almost beside himself with anguish. “Oh, why did he swim out so far?”

The splashing continued. The two boys on the shore stood and watched almost spellbound at the sight. Their faces were white and their hearts were like great lumps in their throats. Neither one had any thought other than that John had been attacked by the shark and was even now being torn to pieces by the great man-eater. They shut their eyes to hide the horror of the thing.

Finally Grant looked again. The splashing had ceased and the water was calm around the spot where John had been. Suddenly he spied a head appearing far out from the shore.

“There he is,” he cried suddenly.

“Who? John?” demanded Fred. “Where?”

“Out there in the same place. He hasn’t gotten him yet.”

“Where’s the shark?”

“I don’t see it.”

“There it is,” exclaimed Fred. “Between John and the shore.”

Sure enough, the great black fin appeared once

more sailing serenely about a few yards distant from John, but between him and land.

"How can he get in?" cried Fred. "The shark is in the way."

"I don't know," said Grant. "Certainly he can't swim right at the shark."

"He never will get in," moaned Fred. "He'll surely be killed."

"He's all right so far."

"I know. He missed him before but he won't again."

"Maybe John can fight him off. You can't tell."

"There he goes again. He's closing in."

The shark did seem to be moving towards John once more. Around and around in circles he went and even from the shore Grant and Fred could see their companion's head turn so as always to keep his eyes fixed on his enemy.

"We must go to him," cried Fred. "We must do something."

"What can we do? We're helpless."

"Can't we swim out?"

"Suppose we did. We couldn't do anything when we got there."

Suddenly the splashing was resumed. John and the shark both disappeared from sight as the water was thrown up in all directions around them.

"What's happened, Grant? I'm afraid to look."

"I think he drove him off."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. There he is. He scared him away again."

"He can't keep that up forever, though," moaned Fred. "He must be getting pretty nearly exhausted by now."

"Look!" cried Grant suddenly. "Here comes Sam."

Running towards them at top speed and throwing off his clothes as he ran came Sam. In his teeth was the long knife he had made so laboriously and spent so many hours to sharpen.

"What's he going to do?" cried Fred in wonderment. "Where are you going, Sam?" he called as the negro came up to the spot where the two boys stood.

"Ah'll get 'im," muttered Sam, and without waiting for another thing he plunged headlong into the water. A moment later he reappeared, the knife still in his mouth, and with powerful strokes struck out for John and the hungry giant that threatened him.

"What's he going to do, Grant?" exclaimed Fred.

"I don't know. Watch him."

"Do you think he can kill the shark with that knife?"

"He's evidently going to try."

“He’ll be too late.”

John was perhaps a hundred and fifty yards from shore now. Slowly he was nearing land and safety, but could he reach it? The great shark still circled around and around the unfortunate boy, evidently waiting for some moment when John should be off his guard to give him an opportunity to strike. John was determined that this should not happen, however, and he watched the shark just as closely as he himself was watched. First he swam on one side and then on the other, then on his back and then on his stomach. Not for a second did he relax his watchfulness.

“Look at Sam go!” exclaimed Grant. “He’s a marvelous swimmer.”

“He’s that all right, but I wish he would get there.”

“There goes the shark,” cried Grant, and as he spoke the big fin could be seen to shoot with lightning-like rapidity in close to the spot where John was. A great splashing immediately followed and then the fin appeared once more some ten or twelve yards distant.

“Whew! That was close,” gasped Grant, his lips ashen with terror.

“He’s getting desperate,” said Fred. “He knows that unless he can get John before he comes much closer to shore his chance is gone.”

“Hurry, Sam!” shouted Grant with all his

strength. "Keep it up, John!" he called. "You'll be all right in a minute!"

"He will not," said Fred in a low voice. "He'll be gone in a minute."

"No he won't," cried Grant. "Sam is almost there."

"Forty yards is a lot."

"Hurry, Sam! Hurry!" begged Grant. "You must hurry!"

"Look!" cried Fred. "The shark must have seen him. He's going away."

"Not 'away,'" Grant corrected. "He's just backing up a little."

Sure enough the shark moved out a little toward the ocean and the fin stood almost still as if it might be debating what should be done next. Evidently the arrival of a second foe had puzzled him. Sharks are not known especially for their bravery. Rather they are scavengers that feed on the ocean's refuse, and they must be very hungry indeed to attack a man unless they have him at a disadvantage. Grant and Fred were aware of this fact, but they feared that this particular shark was very hungry and that he did have John at a disadvantage.

"Maybe he'll go away now that there are two of them," said Fred hopefully.

"Don't be too sure," warned Grant.

"He'll attack soon if he's going to, though."

"Yes, he'll have to. The water gets pretty shallow in a little closer."

"Look at Sam," exclaimed Fred. "He's sending John on ahead of him."

"John must be pretty tired now."

"I should think so."

"He'll be all right in a minute, though. A few more yards and he'll be out of danger."

"There goes the shark again," cried Fred suddenly. "This is about his last chance and it won't be so easy to drive him off this time."

Around and around the two swimmers the shark circled. He moved with amazing rapidity, and it seemed as if the two hard-pressed and tired swimmers must become dizzy if they followed his every move.

"He'll fly around them like that," said Grant, "until he sees a good chance and then you'll see him strike like lightning."

"They mustn't give him a chance," muttered Fred doggedly.

"They won't if they can help it, you may be sure of that."

"There he goes!" cried Fred. "No, not yet," he corrected himself.

"He'll strike, all right. Just watch him."

"If Sam can only use that knife."

"Maybe he won't attack Sam."

"They're awfully close together now," said

Fred. "If he goes for John, Sam can stick him and if he goes for Sam, why he has the knife right there."

"The old knife will never go through that shark's hide," exclaimed Grant. "It's almost as hard as sheet steel."

"Here's the test anyway," cried Fred, and as he spoke the giant fin could be seen darting suddenly towards the two swimmers. Just before it reached them it disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

"He has turned bottom side up to bite," muttered Grant, fully understanding just what was taking place.

Sam and John had noted the approach of their enemy and both realized that the crisis of the whole affair was now at hand. If they could elude him this once, the chances were that they could reach shallow water where the shark would not dare to follow them. They both began to kick violently and splash as much as possible with their hands; they shouted and yelled; they did everything which they thought might possibly aid them in scaring the great ugly fish away.

Grant and Fred on the shore held their breath while all this was taking place and their hearts almost stopped beating. With feverish anxiety they awaited the result of the battle taking place before their very eyes.

"There's John," cried Grant suddenly.
"Where's Sam?"

"I don't see him. I don't see the shark either."

"The splashing has stopped. Sam must have been killed."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Fred. "Don't say that. It can't be."

"Where is he then?"

"Look!" cried Fred.

The water some five or ten yards behind John was suddenly churned into froth. Red, bloody froth it was and evidently some gigantic struggle was going on. All at once, just on the outside of the miniature maelstrom, appeared a small round, black object.

"There's Sam!" shouted Grant.

Sure enough. Sam was still alive and without wasting a moment he struck out boldly for the shore. John was ahead of him, but he was soon overhauled by the powerful negro and side by side the two swimmers plowed through the sea. Behind them the waters were still churned by the struggles of the great shark, but they were rapidly becoming weaker.

"Sam killed the shark," exclaimed Fred, almost overcome by the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the event.

"It looks so," agreed Grant. "I didn't think it was possible."

“Nor I. Imagine the nerve he had, and that old knife certainly did do the work after all.”

“Well, John owes his life to Sam all right. He surely would have been killed if he had been left out there alone.”

“Not a doubt of it. I don’t see how Sam managed it.”

“We’ll find out in a minute. John must be about exhausted too; Sam is helping him in.”

“Want any help, you two?” called Fred to the two swimmers who were rapidly approaching the shore.

“No, thanks,” said John in reply. “Sam will get us in.”

Grant and Fred leaned far out over the water and extended their hands to the two swimmers who were only a few feet distant now. A moment later and they had drawn John up on the shore, where he lay panting, his strength practically all used up. When they turned to assist Sam, however, they found their negro friend clambering up without the least bit of trouble.

“What’s the matter with your shoulder, Sam?” exclaimed Grant in alarm.

The skin seemed to be all torn away and the blood was flowing freely from Sam’s right shoulder. Just what had happened, it was impossible to say.

CHAPTER XX

TALKING IT OVER

“**D**AT,” said Sam, referring to Grant’s question concerning his shoulder, “am wheah Ah come in too clost contact wif dat sha’k.”

“Did he bite you?” exclaimed Fred.

“No, indeed. He jes’ nachully done rub up again’ me, dat’s all.”

“But just rubbing against you wouldn’t tear you up like that,” protested Fred.

“Am dat so? Ah don’t reckon yo’ all evah seen a sha’k at front han’ ef yo’ say dat. Have yo’ evah felt a sha’k’s skin?”

“No, I haven’t. Is it rough?”

“Have you evah felt san’ paper?”

“Lots of times. Is it as rough as that?”

“Lawdy,” exclaimed Sam. “In compahson wif a sha’k’s skin Ah tell yo’ dat san’ paper am lak velvet.”

“I should say it was rough, then,” laughed Fred. “Doesn’t that hurt?”

“It must,” Grant broke in, “and it ought to be attended to at once.”

"Dat's nothin'," said Sam carelessly. "She'll be all right soon."

"I know," Grant protested, "but just look at it bleed."

"All de bettah. When she bleed lak dat dey's no chance ob poison."

"But it ought to be stopped now. Come up by the spring where there's cold water and let me bathe it for you."

"Go ahead, Sam," urged John, looking up and speaking for the first time since he had been brought ashore.

"That's right," agreed Fred. "I'll stay here with John."

"No one need stay with me," said John. "I'm getting my wind back now and as soon as I get a little strength I'll be as good as ever."

"What made you swim so far out anyway?" demanded Fred.

"I don't know. I guess I was crazy."

"You were worse than that," exclaimed Fred. "You were a fool."

"Don't tell me that; I know it myself now. We always do when it's too late."

"Well, I can tell you one thing," said Grant warmly. "You wouldn't be here now if it hadn't been for Sam."

"Right you are," John agreed. "I certainly owe my life to you, Sam."

“Ah guess mebbe Ah will bafe mah shouldah,” said Sam, much embarrassed and ill at ease from all the compliments that were being given him.

“We’ll all go with you,” said John. “I’m all right now.”

“And we’ll make Sam tell us how he did it,” added Fred eagerly.

“That’s right, Sam,” exclaimed Grant. “Tell us all about it.”

“Well,” began Sam slowly, “Ah doan’ know jes’ what dey is to tell. Ah jes’ took dis heah knife wot yo’ all done make so much fun ob, an’ Ah jes’ stick ol’ mistah sha’k plum’ in de belly wid it. Dat’s all dey was to it.”

“But, Sam,” Fred protested, “how did you get close enough to him? Did he attack you?”

“Ah reckon as how he did do dat,” said Sam. “He jes’ came a swimmin’ right at me and natchully dey was only one thing foh me to do.”

“Naturally,” laughed Grant, “but tell us how you happened to get a good chance at him and not be bitten.”

“When Ah seen dat sha’k a comin’ at me,” continued Sam, “Ah knowed dat he meant business. Ah took mah knife in mah right han’ an’ Ah jes’ sunk a tweeeny bit below de sufface ob de watah. He seen me an’ he come right foh me too. Ah waited foh him to turn belly up ’cause Ah knowed dat what he ’bliged to do befoh he able to use dem

razah teeth ob his'n. Sho' nuff jes' befoh he reach me, ovah he go and den was mah chance. Ah sho' did let 'im have it an' Ah guess he ain' gwine bothah no more peoples."

"You must have been under water a long time," remarked Grant.

"Not so berry long," said Sam. "Dat ol' sha'k didn't waste no time about what he doin' an' yo' bet Ah didn't neither."

"I guess not," laughed Grant. "When did he hit your shoulder?"

"Right after Ah done stick 'im. Soon's Ah let 'im hab de knife he done commence thrashin' 'round somethin' terrible. 'Fore Ah could get out ob his way he done hit me a swipe wid dat ol' tail ob his an' dar yo' see it." Sam indicated his shoulder, which was still bleeding, though not as freely as before.

"Well, all I can say is," exclaimed Fred, "that you ought to have a medal. I swear I don't see how anyone could have the nerve to fight a shark in the water. Why, I'd be afraid of one lying half dead on the beach."

"So should I," said Grant. "How big was that fellow anyway, John?"

"Oh, I don't know. He must have been nearly eighteen feet though."

"Come on here," said Fred skeptically, "you can't make us believe a thing like that. Eighteen

feet; why, that's three times as long as you are."

"I know it is. I realized that when I said it."

"Is he right, Sam?" demanded Fred. "Was the shark as big as that?"

"Ah should say he was jes' about dat size," replied Sam seriously.

"All right," laughed Fred. "I won't argue with you, but that's easily the biggest fish story I ever heard."

"It was the biggest fish I ever saw," said John grimly. "Whew!" and he shuddered at the recollection.

"What did you think when you saw him first?" asked Grant curiously.

"I was nearly scared to death," said John so solemnly that everybody laughed. "I was swimming along easily and just taking my time when I suddenly had a feeling that something was near me. I looked around and sure enough, over the top of a little wave, I saw that fin. I tell you it gave me the creeps and I honestly thought my last day had come. I knew it was only a question of time before he attacked me and I watched him pretty closely, I can tell you. All the while I kept trying to get in nearer to shore, but I was afraid to swim fast for I knew that if I did I couldn't watch the shark and that he would get me from behind."

"A nice feeling," remarked Fred grimly.

"I should say so. Well, in a minute I saw him coming and I began to kick and splash with all my might. I didn't think it would be of any use, but I had to do something. Imagine my surprise when I saw him veer away from me. I knew he'd be back though and sure enough he was, and again I scared him away, but I knew it couldn't last forever. He was getting more determined and closer to me each time and Sam got there none too soon I can tell you."

"How did you know what was happening, Sam?" demanded Grant. "I thought you were on watch up by the flag."

"So Ah was. Ah could see jes' the same, couldn't Ah?"

"I guess you could," laughed Grant. "It's lucky you could too."

"Maybe a ship has passed while we were down here," remarked Fred.

"A fine chance," said John skeptically. "No ships ever pass here."

"This island reminds me of that old story about the farmer at the circus," said Grant. "He looked at the giraffe for a long time and then finally turned away in disgust. 'Oh, shucks,' he said, 'there ain't no such animal.' That's the way I feel about this island. There isn't any such place."

"It does seem so, doesn't it?" laughed Fred. "At any rate all the boats seem to avoid it. We may never get a chance to use that signal."

On the summit of the hill near the spot where George's shirt did duty as a flag the boys had prepared a great pile of driftwood. The moment a ship was sighted this pyre was to be lighted to attract the attention of those on board the boat.

"Dey's plenty ob people wot would lak to find dis island all right," said Sam confidently. "Ah knows piles ob sailors wot would gib dere eye teeth to see dis yere island wid de sha'k rock on it."

"Well, we found it all right," exclaimed Grant, "and from the look of things it is just as hard for us to get away from it as it is for most people to find it."

"We've done better than most of them anyway," said Fred. "We've found the island but we can't find the treasure. Most people can't even find the island."

"It hasn't done us any good so far," said Grant. "Now that we're on this wonderful island what are we going to do about it?"

"Solve the code," replied Fred promptly. "Once that is done the rest is easy."

"The same old cry," exclaimed Grant. "That code is beginning to haunt my dreams. I think of it all day and I dream of it all night."

"Perhaps you'll find the answer to it in a dream some time," suggested John.

"If I only could," sighed Grant disconsolately. "Come on," he added, "let's go back to the cave. Have you fixed your shoulder up all right, Sam?"

"It am as good as ebber," replied Sam cheerily.

They made their way along the bank of the little stream that flowed down from the spring. A soft breeze stirred the palm trees and the tropical foliage was brilliant. It would have been difficult to find any more beautiful spot than this little island, set like a jewel, on the bosom of the sparkling sea. The spell of it affected every member of the party and few words were spoken as they walked along.

Soon they came within sight of the cave.

"There's Pop," exclaimed John. "It's about time he got back."

"He'll certainly be excited when he hears about the shark," said Grant. "I wish he had been there with us."

"He's been up to something himself probably," said Fred. "You can trust him for stirring things up, no matter where he is."

"Well, I guess he has been up to something," exclaimed John. "Look at what he's got up there."

CHAPTER XXI

A NEW MEMBER

“**C**OME on,” cried John excitedly. “Let’s get up there and see it.”

“How do you suppose he ever did it?” exclaimed Grant. “He’s a great one, all right.”

Scrambling and hustling up over the rocks George’s four companions vied with one another as to who should be the first to reach the cave. John’s long legs would ordinarily have won the race for him, but he was weakened by the effects of his experience in the water, and Grant out-distanced him. The rest were close behind, however, and all arrived almost together.

“Where did you get it, Pop?” demanded Grant eagerly.

“Oh, down at the other end of the island,” said George evasively.

His face was wreathed in smiles, however, and he was very proud of his exploit.

“I don’t see how you did it,” exclaimed Fred.

“I’m clever.”

“Don’t get funny,” warned Grant. “We’ll take it out of you if you get fresh.”

"You can't touch me now," said George loftily.

"What's the reason we can't?"

"Because if you do, I'll—"

He did not finish the sentence. Instead he leaped to his feet and hanging on to one hand howled with pain. His friends, however, instead of sympathizing with him, all with one accord shrieked delightedly.

"Whew!" cried George feelingly. "He's a good biter all right."

"He," in this case referred to a small green parrot which George had been holding in both hands. In some way it had wriggled loose from his grasp and twisting its head around had taken a good sized bit of flesh out of the back of his hand. This was the cause of George's pain and his friends' mirth.

"Put a muzzle on him, Pop," advised Fred. "He's dangerous."

"He certainly is," agreed George. "I'm afraid he'll bite that string in half too."

"How did you catch him?" inquired Grant curiously. "Did you put salt on his tail?"

George gave the speaker a scornful look. "I caught him," he replied, "because he has a broken wing and can't fly very well. It wasn't any easy job, though."

"How did he break his wing?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him."

"Say, you're getting awfully fresh," exclaimed Grant, pretending that he was angry. "Can't you be serious and tell us how you caught him?"

"Certainly I can. I was walking down around the end of the island when I spied this fellow on the ground. I went up close to him and he just flopped up and down and evidently could use only one wing. I saw right away that it was broken and decided right there and then that he ought to belong to me. I chased him all around for I don't know how long and finally I grabbed him by the tail feathers and hung on. It was no easy thing to do though and I can tell you I nearly gave it up any number of times. Just as I'd get up close to him and make a grab at him, he'd hop away and when I did catch him he tried his best to bite me. He's got plenty of spunk all right," and George looked ruefully at his bleeding hand.

"Are you going to tame him?" asked John.

"I'm going to do my best."

"Do you think he'll stay around here?"

"He will as long as he's tied, that's sure. I got that string off that old tarpaulin; you know the one we had in the life-boat when we left the *Josephine*."

"You ought to clip his wings," said Grant.

"I know it and I intend to, too. I was just waiting for some of you fellows to come back and help me. Where have you been anyway?"

The whole story of John and the shark was related to George, who was naturally very much interested in the account.

"I wish I'd been there to see it," he exclaimed ruefully.

"No, you don't either," said Fred. "I saw it all, but I can tell you I didn't enjoy the experience very much."

"Nor I," agreed Grant. "It was too harrowing for me."

"I don't suppose John had much fun either," said George. "As far as I can see Sam was the only one who got any pleasure out of it at all."

"How about that, Sam?" demanded Grant.

"Oh, Ah didn't mind it so powerful much," grinned Sam.

"Would you want to do it every day?"

"Ah cain't say as how Ah would. One ob dem sha'ks might get me sometime."

"Suppose the shark had swallowed John," George remarked. "He's so tall and skinny that he never could have gotten him down and there he'd stuck right in his throat. He'd been worse than Jonah and the whale."

"Are you going to stand for that, Spike?" inquired Fred mischievously, hoping to start an argument of some kind.

"He has to," said George. "He has nothing

to say about the matter at all," and he assumed a careless and indifferent air.

"If I wasn't so weak just now I certainly would make him eat those words," exclaimed John.

"You hear that?" demanded George. "It's always 'if' with him."

"And you always pick on a man when he's down," retorted John.

"How about me? Just look at the terrible wound I have on the back of my hand."

"Yes," said Grant, "the parrot thought you were bird seed."

"Or a cracker," added Fred.

"That's right," cried George, pretending to be greatly hurt. "You all always take sides against me. Still it's an even match at that."

"I guess we'd better take some of that conceit out of him, don't you?" exclaimed Grant slowly advancing towards George.

"Well, I should say so," cried Fred eagerly, and a moment later George was at the bottom of a pile of four boys, three of whom busied themselves with poking him in the ribs, jouncing up and down on his stomach and in every other way possible making it just as uncomfortable as they could for him.

Everyone was laughing and in good humor, however. Seldom it was that any of these boys lost his temper, for they had learned long ago

just how foolish a proceeding that was. The one who gets angry is always teased, but there is no satisfaction in plaguing a boy who ignores it or gives as good as he receives and always keeps his temper under control.

Finally George was released and all four boys rose to their feet laughing and good natured. Sam had been a greatly interested spectator of these proceedings and had enjoyed them greatly.

"Say," he exclaimed, "dey am jus' about as bad as fightin' sha'ks."

"You notice it took three of them to do it though, don't you, Sam?" exclaimed George, weak from laughter and loss of breath.

"Want some more?" demanded Grant.

"If you'll come one at a time, I'm willing."

"Dat's de way," exclaimed Sam. "One at a time. Dat's fair."

"We'll postpone it till to-morrow," said Grant. "I'm winded."

"You're afraid of me," taunted George.

"Oh, go and play with your parrot," exclaimed Fred. "You're a bird yourself."

"Where is he?" demanded George. "I'd almost forgotten him."

"There he is," said Fred laughingly. "He looks like a little old man sitting up there on that rock."

"He's all right; don't you worry about him," said George. "He's my friend."

"It looked so when he ate the back of your hand off," laughed Grant.

"That's just the way he shows his affection," exclaimed George. "He didn't mean anything by that."

"Well, if that's the case," said Grant, "I'm certainly glad he doesn't care anything about me."

"Catch him, Pop," urged John, "and we'll clip his wings."

"Will you help me? I don't want to lose him now after all the trouble I had to get him. I think I can tame him, too."

"Sure you can. Get him over here."

"How can I do it?"

"I'll show you," exclaimed John. "Watch me."

He seized hold of the string that was tied around the parrot's leg and began to haul in hand over hand. The poor bird fluttered and struggled indignantly but all to no avail. He was quickly pulled along until he was at John's feet when George grabbed him and held him securely.

"Now how can we cut his wings?" demanded Fred. "We have no scissors."

"We have knives, haven't we?" exclaimed George.

"But are they sharp enough?"

"Mine is."

"So am mine," said Sam. "It suttinly done fix dat sha'k all right."

"I'm afraid it's a little too big for a parrot though," laughed Grant. "Don't you think so?"

"P'raps it am," admitted Sam. "It's sho' a good knife dough."

"Spread his wings out on the rock here," directed John. "I'll cut the tips off his feathers so he can't fly away."

"Don't hurt him."

"No danger of that. You just hold him still."

The operation was quickly performed and a few moments later the little green bird was angrily stalking away, shaking his ruffled feathers and uttering indignant squawks at every step.

"Look at him," laughed Grant. "My, but he's mad."

"So would you be," said George. "Imagine being treated like that by someone about a hundred times as big as you are."

"It would rouse me a little," admitted Grant. "What are you going to name him?"

"I don't know. What's a good name, anyway?"

"Call him Snip," suggested Fred. "He certainly took a snip out of you."

"That's a good one," exclaimed George. "His name is Snip."

"You'll have to teach him his name now, Pop,"

said Grant. "That'll give you something to do and keep you out of mischief."

"I want him to talk, too," said George, "and I want him to get so tame that he'll ride around on my shoulder wherever I go."

"And he'll peck your eye out," said John.

"Oh, I guess not. He'll be all right after a while."

"How are you going to go about teaching him to talk?" demanded John. "I suppose he'll have to learn the alphabet first," and he nudged Grant as he spoke.

"Oh, yes, of course," laughed George sarcastically. "You're all pretty smart."

"Why, Pop," said John, soothingly, "it wouldn't take long. There are only twenty-six letters in it."

"What did you say?" cried Grant, suddenly springing to his feet.

"I said there were twenty-six letters in the alphabet."

"Hooray!" shouted Grant, and he began to dance around like a wild man. "I've got it. I've got it," he repeated excitedly over and over again.

CHAPTER XXII

A CLUE

GRANT'S companions sat and looked at him in amazement not unmixed with alarm. They could see no reason for his strange behavior and were at a complete loss what to make of it. They watched their comrade execute a war dance around the entrance to the cave for some moments and finally disappear within, uttering one last triumphant whoop.

"What struck him?" exclaimed John in perplexity.

"He's gone crazy I guess," said Fred. "I can't think of anything else."

"Ah believe yo' am right," said Sam in a hollow voice. "Ef he try to mess me up Ah sho' gwine use dis knife."

"Put that away, Sam," said John, sharply. "Don't be silly."

"But ef he's crazy," protested Sam, "Ah suttinly boun' proteck mahself."

"He's not crazy," exclaimed George. "He'll be out in a minute and tell us just what is wrong with him."

"Go and see what he's doing, Pop," urged Fred.

"I will not. He said he'd got it and he might get me, too. What do you suppose he was talking about anyway?"

"Here he comes now. Ask him."

Grant emerged from the cave, his manner showing how excited he was. He walked rapidly and his hands shook with nervousness. He carried the piece of parchment that had become so familiar to the four boys.

"He must have meant the code," whispered Fred to George.

"He couldn't have solved it," said George in a low voice. "How could he?"

"I don't know. At any rate he may have had an idea."

Grant advanced rapidly towards the spot where his companions were grouped and seated himself in front of them.

"What's going on, Grant?" demanded John curiously.

"Just a minute and I'll show you something," and he spread the code out on the ground while the rest of the little party peered eagerly over his shoulder.

"Now, first of all," began Grant, "you all know what this is."

"It's a combination to a safe," said George readily.

"Keep quiet, Pop," exclaimed Fred. "Give him a chance."

"It's a code," said Grant, ignoring George's facetious remark.

"We know that," agreed Fred. "Don't be so mysterious."

"What's the highest number in it?" demanded Grant.

"He sounds like a trick man," laughed George jeeringly.

"No treasure for Pop," said Grant shortly. "What's the highest number in it?"

"I guess we'll have to do it this way," said John with a sigh. "Let me see," he added. "I guess twenty-five is the highest number."

"All right. How many letters are there in the alphabet?"

"Twenty-six."

"But, Grant," Fred protested, "I don't see what you're getting at?"

"You will soon enough. Just have a little patience."

"But why don't you tell us what your idea is right now?"

"Because I don't want to. At any rate it's only an idea and I don't know whether it's right or not and I haven't worked it out myself. That's what we are doing now and I want you all to help me. The whole thing may be wrong, but it sounds

pretty good to me. John's remark about the number of letters in the alphabet gave me the idea."

"Then I ought to get the credit if we solve the code," exclaimed John.

"You'll be lucky if you don't get shot," said George. "You ought to be."

"Go ahead with your explanation, Grant," urged Fred. "Everybody keep quiet and give him a chance."

"All right," said Grant. "We've noticed that the highest number is twenty-five and that there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet, haven't we?"

"We have," said John so solemnly that George giggled outright. His friends, however, were in a very serious mood and he quickly realized that his hilarity was decidedly out of place.

"What number appears most frequently?"

"I guess fourteen does," said Fred after a hasty survey of the figures spread out on the ground before them.

"No, five," exclaimed John. "There are a good many more fives than there are fourteens."

"Perhaps there are," Fred admitted. "Go ahead, Grant."

Grant made some calculations that his comrades could not follow before he replied to Fred's remark. His friends eyed him curiously.

"Suppose we put the letter *e* wherever the number five occurs," he said at length.

"What are you going to do that for?" demanded George, now very much interested in the experiment Grant was conducting.

"Never mind why," exclaimed Grant. "Do as I say."

"Give me a sheet out of your diary, Pop," said Fred. "I'll do the figuring."

"Are you going to write it all down?" inquired George.

"Shall I, Grant?"

"Put it all down. We'll go slowly, but we'll do it right."

"All right," exclaimed Fred. "Here goes," and he wrote as follows, substituting the letter for the number every time he came to it:

20 - 1 - 11 - e - 1 - 3 - 15 - 21 - 18 - 19 - e - 4 -
 21 - e - 14 - 15 - 18 - 20 - 8 - 15 - 14 - e - 8 - 21 -
 14 - 18 - e - 4 - 6 - e - e - 20 - 6 - 18 - 15 - 13 - 20 -
 8 - e - 19 - 15 - 21 - 20 - 8 - e - 18 - 14 - e - 24 -
 20 - 18 - e - 13 - 9 - 20 - 25 - 15 - 6 - 19 - 8 - 1 -
 18 - 11 - 18 - 15 - 3 - 11 - 20 - 8 - e - 14 - e - 1 -
 19 - 20 - 6 - 9 - 6 - e - e - 20 - 1 - 14 - 4 - 14 - 15 -
 18 - 20 - 8 - 2 - 25 - e - 1 - 19 - 20 - 20 - 8 - 9 - 18 -
 20 - 25 - 20 - 8 - 18 - e - e - 4 - 9 - 7.

"Well," exclaimed George when Fred had finished, "it may be very simple and all that, but it doesn't mean anything to me."

"Of course, not yet," said Grant. "Have a little patience."

"Why don't you tell us what your system is?"

"No, you wait."

"How about fourteen now?" demanded Fred. "We decided that was a pretty common number, you know. What shall I do with that?"

"I'll tell you," said Grant and once again he appeared to calculate something in his head. "In place of fourteen put the letter *n*," he directed, "and use the copy you just made."

"What do you mean by the copy I just made?"

"I mean leave the letter *e* where you put it in the last time."

"Here we go," exclaimed Fred and this is what he wrote:

20 - 1 - 11 - e - 1 - 3 - 15 - 21 - 18 - 19 - e - 4 -
 21 - e - n - 15 - 18 - 20 - 8 - 15 - n - e - 8 - 21 - n -
 4 - 18 - e - 4 - 6 - e - e - 20 - 6 - 18 - 15 - 13 - 20 -
 8 - e - 19 - 15 - 21 - 20 - 8 - e - 18 - n - e - 24 -
 20 - 18 - e - 13 - 9 - 20 - 25 - 15 - 6 - 19 - 8 - 1 -
 18 - 11 - 18 - 15 - 3 - 11 - 20 - 8 - e - n - e - 1 -
 19 - 20 - 6 - 9 - 6 - 20 - 25 - 6 - e - e - 20 - 1 - n -
 4 - n - 15 - 18 - 20 - 8 - 2 - 25 - e - 1 - 19 - 20 -
 20 - 8 - 9 - 18 - 20 - 25 - 20 - 8 - 18 - e - e - 4 -
 9 - 7.

"Clear as mud," cried George, slapping Fred heartily on the back. "You're a wonder, Pee-wee, my boy."

"I must confess I don't understand all this business," exclaimed Fred. "Why don't you tell us what you are trying to do, Grant?"

"Because I'm not sure that I know myself."

"Tell us what you think anyway," urged John. "There's no harm in that."

"I'd rather not," said Grant. "If you fellows don't want to help me any more though, I'm perfectly willing to work it out by myself."

"No, you don't," exclaimed Fred. "If there's anything going to happen around here I want to be on hand."

"An' me too," said Sam eagerly. "Ah wants to be heah when dat treasah am discovahed. Ah'll fix dem niggers in Richmond yet."

"Good boy, Sam," exclaimed Grant. "You and I will work it out together."

"Ah cain't read nor write," said Sam disconsolately. "Ah's afraid Ah wouldn't be ob bery much help to yo'. Ah can suttingly do some diggin' dough."

"Oh, I'm going to stay along; don't worry about that," said Fred. "I wish Grant would tell us what he's trying to do, but I'm going to stay by him whether he tells or not."

"I know what he's trying to do," said George. "It's simple enough."

"What is it then?" demanded Grant.

"Why, he thinks these numbers are used in

place of letters. A certain number means a certain letter and wherever he sees it he substitutes the letter."

"We all know that much," cried John scornfully. "What we want to know is how he figures out what letter to put in place of a certain number. Can you tell us that?"

"No, I can't," George admitted ruefully.

"Then you don't know how he does it, do you?"

"No, I don't. That is, not yet."

"Go ahead then, Grant," exclaimed John. "We're wasting time here."

"You want to go on with it, do you?"

"Of course we do."

Grant picked up the code and studied it attentively for some moments. Finally he put it down again. "Suppose we put the letter *h* in place of the figure eight," he said. "Eight seems to be a fairly common number."

Once again Fred copied the mysterious set of numbers, making the change that Grant had suggested.

CHAPTER XXIII

PROGRESS

WHEN Fred had completed his task the following result appeared:

20 - 1 - 11 - e - 1 - 3 - 15 - 21 - 18 -
19 - e - 4 - 25 - e - n - 15 - 18 - 20 - h - 15 - n -
e - h - 21 - n - 4 - 18 - e - 4 - 6 - e - e - 20 - 6 -
18 - 15 - 13 - 2 - h - e - 19 - 15 - 21 - 20 - h - e -
18 - n - e - 24 - 20 - 18 - e - 13 - 9 - 20 - 25 - 15 -
6 - 19 - h - 1 - 18 - 11 - 18 - 15 - 3 - 11 - 20 - h -
e - n - e - 1 - 19 - 20 - 6 - 9 - 6 - 20 - 25 - 6 - e -
e - 20 - 1 - n - 4 - n - 15 - 18 - 20 - h - 2 - 25 - e -
1 - 19 - 20 - 20 - h - 9 - 18 - 20 - 25 - 20 - h - 18 -
e - e - 4 - 9 - 7.

“Is it coming out all right, Grant?” asked John.
“It doesn’t look like very much to me just yet.”

“It doesn’t spell any words yet,” said Fred.

“Yes, indeed, it certainly does,” exclaimed Grant. “There’s *he* a couple of times. That spells something, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, that does,” admitted Fred, “but what can *n - e - h* be? I never heard of that word or *e - n - e* either.”

“You must remember that it isn’t all done yet

by a good deal," Grant protested. "You see we've substituted only three letters so far and it spells two words already. I call that pretty good work."

"Yes, and in a minute you may run up against a snag and find that you're all wrong," said George.

"Quite right," admitted Grant. "If my system is wrong we'll find it out pretty soon, too. It seems to me to be worth trying though."

"Oh, I think so, too," exclaimed Fred readily. "Let's try another now."

"Why can't you substitute two at once?" said John. "That would save a lot of time."

"I know it would," admitted Grant. "It would also double the chances of mistakes and we don't want to make any if we can help it."

"We'll be careful," said George. "Go into another trance, Grant, and tell us two letters this time. You're a regular Hindoo fakir and for all I know you may have hypnotized the whole crowd of us."

"Come on, Pop! Be serious," exclaimed John.

"I am serious and I'm just as anxious to solve this as you are. You don't mind if I get a little fun out of it though, do you?"

"Got the letters, Grant?" demanded Fred of the owner of the secret, who was busily engaged in more calculations. His eyes were half shut

and he did a great deal of counting on his fingers.

"Ssh," hissed George softly, but no one noticed him.

"All right," said Grant suddenly. "Put *r* in place of eighteen and *t* in place of twenty."

"I've got your system," exclaimed John all at once. "I had an idea before and now I'm quite sure of it."

"What is it, String?" inquired George eagerly.

"I won't tell you. Wait and see if I'm right."

"I thought you said you were."

"I think I am."

"Don't tell him, String, if you know," urged Grant.

"I won't; don't worry about that. Isn't it simple?"

"Just like you," muttered George, but no one heeded him.

"Go ahead, Fred," said Grant. "Write it out again."

When Fred had complied the code had the following appearance,—

t - 1 - 11 - e - 1 - 3 - 15 - 21 - r - 19 - e - 4 -
 21 - e - n - 15 - 4 - t - h - 15 - n - e - h - 21 - n - 4 -
 r - e - 4 - 6 - e - e - t - 6 - r - 15 - 13 - t - h - e -
 19 - 15 - 21 - t - h - e - r - n - e - 24 - t - r - e -
 13 - 9 - t - 25 - 15 - 6 - 19 - h - 1 - r - 11 - r - 15 -
 3 - 11 - t - h - e - n - e - 1 - 19 - t - 6 - 9 - 6 - t -

25 - 6 - e - e - t - 1 - n - 4 - n - 15 - r - t - h - 2 -
25 - e - 1 - 19 - t - t - h - 9 - r - t - 25 - t - h - r -
e - e - 4 - 9 - 7.

"Well, you've got more letters in it than you had anyway," exclaimed George, "and right down at the end there it spells the word *three*. Grant, I believe you may be on the right track after all."

"Yes, sir, we'll all be rich soon," exclaimed John. "Just think of us going home with great bags of gold and jewels slung over each shoulder."

"Say!" cried Sam, his eyes sparkling and his ivory teeth showing in a dazzling smile. "Wouldn't dat be great?"

"See any ships coming to rescue us?" said John. "Who wants to be rescued anyway? We're going to find the gold; we're going to find the gold!" and he danced joyously around, waving his arms about his head while he chanted over and over again the same refrain, "We're going to find the gold; we're going to find the gold!"

"I'm afraid you're a little previous, String," laughed Grant, looking up from the code which he had been studying intently. "We haven't got it yet, you know."

"But we shall," insisted John joyously. "We'll find it all right."

"Let's keep at it," exclaimed Fred. "That's

the best way I know to accomplish anything. Talking about it doesn't do much good."

"Give him a couple more letters then, Grant," exclaimed George.

"Let me give him one," said John. "See if I can guess right."

"All right," said Grant, "you try it this time and see if you know the trick."

"Give me two," said Fred. "We worked two at a time before and we ought to be able to do it again."

"What numbers do you want letters for?" inquired John.

"Let me see," mused Fred. "How about eleven and fifteen?"

"Just a second now," and John began to calculate and count on his fingers just as Grant had done.

"Another fakir," whispered George, but as usual no one paid the slightest attention to him. Every one was intent upon the code and too much interested in it to be diverted by anything else.

"Put *k* in place of eleven, and *o* in place of fifteen," said John after he had apparently satisfied himself as to the correctness of his calculations. "Is that correct, Grant?"

"Absolutely," said Grant. "You know the system all right."

"You might tell us," exclaimed George enviously.

"Keep quiet, Pop, and watch me," ordered Fred, and once more he rewrote the code while his companions watched him eagerly. This is what he wrote:

t-1-k-e-1-3-o-21-r-19-e-4-21-e-
n-o-r-t-h-o-n-e-h-21-n-4-r-e-
4-6-e-e-t-6-r-o-13-t-h-e-19-o-
31-t-h-e-r-n-e-24-t-r-e-13-t-25-
o-6-19-h-1-r-k-r-o-e-k-t-h-e-
n-e-1-19-t-6-9-6-t-25-6-e-e-t-
1-n-4-n-o-r-t-h-2-25-e-1-19-t-
t-h-9-r-t-25-t-h-r-e-e-4-9-7.

"You're getting rid of the numbers fast enough anyway," exclaimed George. "It looks like Greek to me though."

"Maybe it's written in some foreign language," suggested Fred. "Wouldn't that be awful?"

"Perhaps it's Finnish," said George. "We got it from a Finn."

"Dey's always ha'd luck," exclaimed Sam soberly. "Ef some Finn done wrote dat we don't stan' no chance ob eber findin' de treasah."

"You mean it will be our finish, is that it?" laughed George.

"Ah wouldn't be at all s'prised," said Sam solemnly.

“What makes you think it’s not written in English?” demanded Grant.

“Well, just look along there in the middle,” said George. “It says r-k-r-o, and then k-t-h-e-n-e. Did you ever hear of any words that sounded like that?”

“No, but towards the end it spells two words distinctly,” protested Grant, “Just see there, n-o-r-t-h, and t-h-r-e-e. Certainly they spell *north* and *three*, don’t they?”

“They do,” admitted George. “That’s what puzzles me. Part of it seems to be all right and part wrong. Are you sure your system is right?”

“Not yet, but I’m getting surer all the time. How about you, String?”

“I agree with you, Grant. We’ll have it all in a minute.”

“Maybe it’s written in two languages,” said Fred. “Sometimes they do a thing like that, you know, to make it all the harder.”

“You’re a cheerful soul,” exclaimed Grant grimly. “If it’s written in two languages we’ll be about as badly off as we were before.”

“And we shan’t know whether we’re right or not,” added George.

“I say go ahead anyway the way we have been doing,” exclaimed Fred. “We seem to be making some sort of progress.”

"Tell us what letter corresponds to number one," said George.

"A," almost shouted John and Grant together.

"You seem to agree on that at any rate," laughed George. "Why don't you tell us what your system is?"

"I should think you'd have guessed it by this time," said Grant. "Why, it's just as simple as rolling off a log."

"Oh, yes, of course," said George sarcastically. "Everything is when you know all about it. I think you might let Fred and me into your secret."

"One stands for *a*," was Grant's reply. "Nineteen stands for *s*. That's all I'll tell you now. Go ahead and put those down if you want to."

"Write it down, Fred," said George sorrowfully. "My," he added under his breath, "I hate stingy people."

Again Fred wrote:—

t-a-k-e-a-3-o-21-r-s-e-4-21-e-
n-o-r-t-h-o-n-e-h-21-n-4-r-e-
4-6-e-e-t-6-r-o-13-t-h-e-s-o-
21-t-h-e-r-n-e-24-t-r-e-13-9-t-
25-o-6-s-h-a-r-k-o-3-k-t-h-e-
n-e-a-s-t-6-9-6-t-25-6-e-e-t-
a-n-4-n-e-r-t-h-2-25-e-a-s-t-
t-h-9-r-t-25-t-h-r-e-e-4-9-7.

“Keep it up,” urged George. “Let’s not discuss it any more until it is all written out. Give him some more letters.”

“Take *u* for twenty-one and *f* for six,” said Grant.

“Give me three this time,” said Fred. “There aren’t many left.”

“All right. Take *i* for nine.”

Once more Fred wrote it out as follows:

t-a-k-e-a-3-o-o-u-r-s-e-4-u-e-n-o-r-t-h-o-n-e-h-u-n-4-r-e-4-f-e-e-t-f-r-o-13-t-h-e-s-o-u-t-h-e-r-n-e-24-t-r-e-13-i-t-25-o-f-s-h-a-r-k-r-o-3-k-t-h-e-n-e-a-s-t-f-i-f-t-25-f-e-e-t-a-n-4-n-o-r-t-h-2-25-e-a-s-t-t-h-e-r-t-25-t-h-r-e-e-4-i-7.

“That’s the way,” cried George. “Give him some more. Clean it up this time.”

“Let’s see,” said Grant musingly. “What numbers are left?”

“Three, four, thirteen, twenty-four, twenty-five, two and seven,” said George. “I think that’s all.”

“All right,” exclaimed Grant, “we’ll finish it up. Go ahead, Fred, and in place of three put *c*, in place of four *d*, put *m* for thirteen, *x* for twenty-four, *y* for twenty-five, *b* for two, and let’s see, *g* for seven. That ought to do it.”

“Here I go,” said Fred, beginning to write at once. “You tell me what to do when I come to those numbers.”

Grant prompted him and the whole code of numbers was soon translated into letters, reading as follows in its final form:

t-a-k-e-a-c-o-u-r-s-e-d-u-e-
n-o-r-t-h-o-n-e-h-u-n-d-r-e-d-
f-e-e-t-f-r-o-m-t-h-e-s-o-u-t-
h-e-r-n-e-x-t-r-e-m-i-t-y-
o-f-s-h-a-r-k-r-o-c-k-t-h-e-n-
e-a-s-t-f-i-f-t-y-f-e-e-t-a-n-
d-n-o-r-t-h-b-y-e-a-s-t-t-h-
i-r-t-y-t-h-r-e-e-d-i-g.

CHAPTER XXIV

SOLVED

“**T**HERE it is,” exclaimed Fred when he had finished writing.

“What does it say?” demanded George. “It’s certainly jumbled up.”

“We’ll start at the beginning,” said Grant eagerly, “and spell out the letters and see if we can’t make words out of them.”

“Read them out loud,” suggested Fred, “and go slow.”

“T,” began Grant, “that doesn’t spell anything. T-a; T-a-k; T-a-k-e.”

“Take,” exclaimed George. “There’s a word.”

“Good,” cried John. “Go ahead from there, Grant.”

“A,” said Grant.

“That’s a word,” cried Fred. “We’ve got ‘take a,’ so far.”

“C,” said Grant. “C-o; C-o-u; C-o-u-r.”

“That means ‘heart’ in French,” exclaimed George. “The next three letters, s-e-d, mean ‘but’ in French. Do you suppose that could be right?”

"It doesn't make sense that way," said John.
"Take a heart but.' What does that mean?"

"Perhaps every word doesn't count," George suggested.

"Look here," exclaimed Grant. "What does c-o-u-r-s-e spell?"

"Course, of course," said John laughingly.

"Certainly it does," said Grant. "That's the word we want. So far we have three; 'take a course.' Doesn't that sound more like it to you fellows than some sort of French that George is trying to bring into it?"

"Absolutely," said Fred with great conviction.
"'Take a course' is right, and the next word is d-u-e, due."

"Correct," cried Grant. "Why, this is easy. Just see if I can't read the whole thing right off now."

"Try it anyway," said John. "Take it slow."

Grant studied the letters in front of him for some moments in silence. "I've got it," he exclaimed at length. "Just listen to this," and he began to read slowly, "'Take a course due north one hundred feet from the south—'" he paused.

"From the southern, isn't it?" queried John.

"That's it. 'Take a course due north one hundred feet from the southern extremity of shark rock, then east fifty feet and north by east thirty-three dig.'"

“Correct,” cried John, “only you ought to have read the last of it like this: ‘and north by east thirty-three. Dig!’” and he shouted the final word with all his might.

“We’re going to find the gold, we’re going to find the gold!” shouted Fred, borrowing John’s chant, and a moment later every one in the little party had joined hands and was dancing joyously about singing and laughing and shouting. Finally they stopped from sheer exhaustion.

“Read dat again, will yo’?” demanded Sam eagerly.

“Read it, Grant,” shouted George. “We’re going to find the gold, we’re going to find the gold!”

“If you’ll keep quiet a minute I’ll read it,” said Grant, and while every one listened with rapt attention he read again the words it had taken them so many days and weeks to discover. “‘Take a course due north one hundred feet from the southern extremity of shark rock, then east fifty feet and north by east thirty-three. Dig.’”

“Say, I just happened to think,” exclaimed Fred in dismay. “How are we going to get those directions right? How can we tell north from south except in a general sort of way?”

“Fred,” said George, pretending to be greatly disappointed in his comrade, “how long will it take you to learn that whenever anything is

needed, I am the one who always has it? Don't you know that I always wear a compass and don't you remember Captain Dodge on board the *Josephine* complimenting me on the fact one time? You are a great trial to me, Fred," and George shook his head sorrowfully.

"Well, I'm glad you've got it anyway," said Fred shortly. "I still don't see, though, how we are going to measure distances."

"That will be hard," admitted Grant. "How long are your feet, String?"

"A yard and a half," said George readily, and immediately ducked to escape a blow aimed in his direction by the owner of the feet in question.

"Ten inches," replied John. "That is, my shoes are just exactly that long, for I remember measuring them in the gymnasium just before I left home. They're in the cave if you want them."

"Not now," said Grant. "It's too late to do anything to-day, anyway, and it'll be dark in a little while. If your shoes are exactly ten inches long though, we can measure with them and figure out the distance easy enough."

"Are you sure that the shark rock the code speaks of is the one on the end of the island here?" exclaimed Fred.

"Sho' it am," said Sam. "Dey nevah was two rocks lak dat one."

"I guess that's right," agreed Fred. "It must be the one."

"Certainly it is," said John. "We wouldn't have found two codes on this island unless the spot they referred to was here too."

"Oh, that's the rock all right," said Grant confidently. "I wish we could start right down there now, but I suppose it would be foolish."

"I think we've done enough for one day anyhow," said John. "As long as we have solved the code we can't have much to complain of for one day's work."

"You haven't told us how you did it yet," said George.

"Haven't you found out for yourself? My, but you're dull."

"Perhaps I am," admitted George. "I don't see it though."

"Nor I," added Fred. "Tell us how you did it."

"How many letters are there in the alphabet?" asked Grant.

"Twenty-six," said George.

"What's the first letter?"

"A."

"What's the second?"

"B."

"And the third?"

"C."

"What's the twenty-sixth?"

"Z."

"You know your alphabet anyway," laughed Grant. "Now this is how the code works; *a* is the first letter so we call it one, *b* is the second so we call that two, and so on all the way through. For instance, the letter *s* would be number nineteen, and *t* would be twenty. Do you see the idea?"

"Yes, I see that," said George. "Explain the rest."

"Why, it's just this. Wherever number one came we put the letter *a*. If number thirteen appeared we'd substitute the thirteenth letter in the alphabet in its place."

"Which would be *m*," said George after a little calculation on his fingers.

"That's right," exclaimed Grant. "Now do you see how it was done?"

"Of course. Isn't that simple?"

"It took us long enough to find it out though," said John.

"Well, I should say so," exclaimed George. "Weren't we stupid?"

"I don't know," said Grant. "The simplest things are often the hardest to explain. Of course when you get the key the rest is easy enough."

"According to this code then," said Fred, "one, two, three would be *a*, *b*, *c*. Is that right?"

“Yes,” said Grant, “and twenty-four, twenty-five and twenty-six would be x, y, z .”

“I see,” exclaimed Fred. “You couldn’t have a number higher than twenty-six in this code then, could you?”

“Of course not. There are only that many letters in the alphabet, you see.”

“How did you ever happen to think of it, Grant?”

“Well, I guess I’d thought of about everything else possible,” laughed Grant. “When I heard Pop talking about teaching his parrot the alphabet and somebody said there were twenty-six letters in it, I got an idea all of a sudden. I knew those figures backwards and forwards and I remembered that twenty-five was the highest number in it. That would mean that twenty-six stood for the letter z , but that is so uncommon anyway that it didn’t seem strange that it should be missing. It was a new idea and it struck me right away as being a good one.”

“It certainly was,” exclaimed George. “We ought to give you a medal, Grant.”

“Wouldn’t a gold piece do?” laughed Fred.

“It sho’ would suit me,” grinned Sam. “Ah does want one ob dem dere diamon’ ho’seshoes, dough.”

“Well, when you get enough gold pieces you can buy one,” said Grant. “Don’t you think your

friends back home would be jealous of you though?" and he winked slyly at his companions.

"Ah suttinly does hope so," exclaimed Sam heartily. "Dey's a lot of good fo' nothin' no 'count niggers anyhow."

"Would you work any more if you had a lot of money?" asked George.

"Work!" exclaimed Sam disdainfully. "Hello, dere, foolish! What yo' think Ah am anyhow? Yo' must think Ah'm plumb crazy," and Sam looked pityingly at George. "Ob co'se Ah wouldn't nebber lif' mah han' agin."

"Don't you think you'd get tired of doing nothing?" laughed George.

"Jes' lemme try it onct," and Sam snorted at the idea of any one being so silly as to work unless he was compelled to do so.

"Well, I hope you do get rich, Sam," exclaimed John, "and I hope all the rest of us do too."

"Dis am de place fo' it," said Sam confidently. "Jes' think how many people would gib dere eyes jes' to fin' dis yere island."

"Finding the island wouldn't do them much good unless they knew where to look after they got here," said Grant.

"But we do know," exclaimed Fred. "All we have to do now is to make a few measurements and do a little digging."

"It may be a good deal of digging," said Grant.

"We don't know how deep the stuff is buried, you know."

"And we don't care," said George. "I'd dig all the way to China to get that stuff if it was necessary."

"I wish we had some tools," sighed John. "It may be slow work."

"Oh, I don't know," said George. "It's all sand down around that end of the island and we can use sticks and anything we can get hold of."

"An' mah knife," added Sam eagerly.

"Yes," agreed Grant. "That knife will help a lot."

"We can get Snip to use his beak on the tough spots," suggested Fred.

"Yes," laughed George. "By the way he dug into my hand he ought to be able to tear holes in the ground without any trouble at all."

"Let's get to sleep," said Grant, "and at the crack of dawn to-morrow we'll be down at the old shark rock with our compass and String's shoe ready to make ourselves wealthy."

It was an excited little party that turned in presently and dreamed of gold and treasure unheard of all the rest of the warm tropical night.

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE BEACH

THE sun had scarcely made its appearance above the horizon the following day when the inmates of the cave were astir.

"Get up everybody," shouted Grant, the first to arise. "We've got work to do."

"You won't have to call me twice," exclaimed John, hastily rising to his feet. "It seems to me I've been awake half the night anyway, just waiting for that old sun to come out and give us enough light to see."

"Suppose it had been a cloudy day and the sun hadn't come out, String," said George, who had now joined the others. "I suppose you'd have had to stay in bed all day. My, that would have been tough luck."

"You're pretty funny for so early in the morning," said John shortly. "After you've broken your back digging for a couple of hours maybe you won't feel quite so smart."

"My back will never get tired digging for gold," laughed George. "I could keep at it for a week and not even feel it."

"An' me too," chimed in Sam. "Ah is pow'ful strong when it come to dat kind ob diggin'."

"Well, let's get some breakfast and then give all these strong men a chance," laughed Fred.

"Aren't you going swimming first?" demanded George.

"I'm going, I know that," said John enthusiastically. "I don't intend to miss any swims in the mornings if I can help it."

"How about sharks?" queried Grant. "I should think you'd have had just about all the swimming you'd want, String."

"No, indeed," laughed John. "I can tell you one thing, though, and that is that I intend to stick awfully close to shore."

"You won't be any closer than I will," exclaimed George seriously. "I'll leave the middle of the ocean to the fish and not dispute it with them at all."

"Who's coming?" called George, who had already started. It seemed that every one was, for a moment later the other four members of the little family were close behind George. All were in excellent spirits and an air of suppressed excitement seemed to pervade the atmosphere around about them. When any one spoke it was in a tense tone and every laugh sounded somewhat nervous. Eyes sparkled eagerly and breath came

a trifle faster when the thought of the buried gold arose in any one's mind.

"Diamond horseshoes, Sam!" exclaimed John, slapping the grinning negro heartily on the back. "Diamond horseshoes right after breakfast."

"'Deed Ah hopes so," said Sam. "Ah sho' could use one ob dem."

"Not here, though," laughed Grant. "Pretty soon we shan't have anything to wear if our clothes get very much more ragged."

"That's right, Sam," said John. "You couldn't wear your diamond horseshoe on this island."

"Does yo' really think dey is any ob dem in dat chest?" asked Sam very seriously and very eagerly.

"I doubt it," laughed John. "I don't believe they wore such things in the days when this treasure was buried."

"Dat's all right dough," said Sam cheerfully. "As yo' say Ah wouldn't hab no use fo' one on dis yere island. All Ah wants am gold enough to buy one when Ah gets back to Richmon'. Dat's when Ah wants it, an', golly, say won't dem niggers be jealous." He laughed aloud as he usually did at the thought, for it was a most pleasing prospect to him. He was scarcely more than a child in mind; his great, and seemingly his supreme, desire to make his friends jealous showed this.

"Maybe we'll find some earrings," suggested Fred. "We can wear those, and if we find bracelets and gold arm-bands and anklets and things like that we can put them all on and look like a bunch of cannibals."

"You've certainly got a great,—" George began sarcastically, when a cry from Grant suddenly interrupted him. Grant had gained somewhat on the remainder of the band and was down near the shore when he called.

"What's the matter with him?" exclaimed John in a puzzled manner. "What does he see and what's he running after?"

"Let's go find out," cried Fred eagerly.

"Come on everybody! Hurry up!" called Grant, stopping for a moment and turning around. Down along the coast he ran, passing the ledge where they usually went swimming and continuing his course towards a small crescent-shaped beach only a short distance away.

"I'm not going to miss anything," exclaimed George, and he also commenced to run, followed closely by his three companions.

In a few moments they saw the cause of Grant's excitement. When they reached the spot where they usually bathed they spied him standing on the shore gazing at an object which lay at his feet.

"Look at that," exclaimed George, increasing his speed.

"What a monster," echoed Fred.

The remaining distance between them and the object of their attention was covered in a remarkably short time by the three boys and their negro companion. Every one was eager to be the first on the spot.

"What do you think of that for a shark?" demanded Grant when the others had come to the place where he was standing.

"That's not a shark, that's a gunboat," exclaimed George grimly. "Where did it come from?"

"It washed ashore."

"Is it dead?"

"No," jeered Fred. "It isn't dead, Pop. It just crawled up on shore for a little nap."

"You think you're smart," retorted George. "I just asked for information."

"And I gave it to you, didn't I?"

"Stop your fighting, you two," exclaimed John. "Give some one else a chance."

"How did it get here?" said George curiously. "What killed it?"

"Come around this side and I'll show you," said Grant.

All the others went with George and with the giant shark lying on its side, its white belly towards the waves, Grant pointed out the cause of its death.

"There it is," he said quietly. A great gaping wound showed squarely in the center of the shark's belly. It must have been nearly a foot in length.

"Whew!" whistled George. "Who did that?"

"Sam did it," said John. "Isn't that right, Sam?"

"Ah reckon it am."

"Is this the shark that was after you, String?" exclaimed George.

"That's the one."

"And Sam killed him," said George unable to fully understand it all. "I don't see how he did it. Why, this shark must be twenty feet long."

"Yes," cried Grant, "and when somebody told you it was eighteen feet long you laughed. You said it was the biggest fish story you'd ever heard."

"I take it back," said George simply.

"How do you suppose he got here?" exclaimed John, who was examining with personal interest the mouth of the giant fish. Row after row of great white teeth, sharp as knives, were seen in the huge jaw. John shuddered as he remembered how nearly he had come to losing his life to those wicked weapons.

"It simply was washed up here by the waves," said Grant. "It was thrashing around out there at a great rate after Sam and String had come

ashore yesterday. I suppose it finally died and drifted in."

"Well, I think Sam was wonderful to dispose of that fellow the way he did," exclaimed George. "How did you do it, Sam?"

"With mah ol' knife."

"You thought he bit the shark to death, I suppose, Pop," laughed Fred.

"Hot air!" was George's only reply to his remark. Just what he meant by such a slang expression he probably knew best of all.

"Let's measure the shark," exclaimed Grant. "I'd like to settle the dispute once and for all and then when we go home and tell the story, people will have to believe us for we'll all be witnesses."

"How are you going to measure?" inquired Fred. "String's shoe is up in the cave, you know."

"We'll use String himself instead of his shoe," suggested Grant.

"What do you all take me for?" demanded John. "I'm no tape measure."

"How tall are you?" asked Grant.

"Six feet two."

"In your stocking feet?"

"Yes, and my bare feet, too."

"All right then," laughed Grant. "Just lie down alongside the shark."

"Go ahead, String," urged Fred. "It won't hurt you."

"I suppose not," sighed John and he stretched himself at full length on the beach, the soles of his feet exactly on a line with the tip of the shark's tail. Grant then marked the spot where his head came and John moved up to this spot and lay down once more. Again Grant indicated the spot by a mark in the sand and the performance was repeated. Four times it was necessary to do this before John had finally covered the entire length of the shark.

"He's three and one-third times as long as you are, String," announced Grant, when the measurements were completed.

"That's twenty feet," exclaimed George. "Say, that's a real fish, isn't it?"

"I should think so," said Fred. "I'm also glad that he is dead and lying on the beach, for I'm afraid I couldn't enjoy a swim with that fellow hanging around."

"There are others," said John.

"They won't get me where I'm going in though," laughed Fred. "I'll be so close to shore that any shark would run aground trying to get at me."

"Let's all go in," exclaimed Grant. "We've got work to-day and if we are going swimming we'd better hurry."

"Ah mus' hab one o' dem teeth," said Sam, referring to the array in the ugly mouth of the great shark.

"What do you want one of them for?" asked George curiously.

" 'Cause it am sho' to bring yo' luck."

"Then I want one too," cried George. "I want luck myself."

"Get us each one, will you, Sam?" exclaimed Fred. "We can at least wear them for watch fobs when we get home."

"They'll help us to find the gold maybe," suggested George.

"Don't worry about that," exclaimed John, confidently. "We'll find the gold all right and we don't need any shark teeth or anything else to help us, either."

"Well, I say we don't fool around here any more, but go and get the gold," said Fred. "All we've done so far is to talk about it."

A moment later they were all splashing around in the water enjoying their early morning swim. Soon afterward they returned to the cave, where they collected everything they had that might aid them in their search for the buried treasure. They spent but little time there, however, and then quickly started on their way towards the big black rock that was so strangely fashioned in the

semblance of a shark. Never did a party start out more eagerly or with higher hopes than this little band of castaways on their search for buried wealth.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SPOT IS MARKED

“**Y**OU’VE got your compass, haven’t you, Pop?” demanded Grant.

“Right in my hand,” replied George, holding the precious article in question up to view.

“Does it work?” asked Fred, slyly.

“Of course it works,” said George loftily. “Anything that I have is all right. You ought to know that by this time.”

“If we didn’t have so much work ahead of us this morning,” said Fred, “I should suggest that we stop here for a minute and take the conceit out of him.”

“Oh, Pop’s all right,” laughed Grant. “He just feels good to-day.”

“Why didn’t you bring your nice gentle little parrot along, Pop?” inquired John. “He’d have enjoyed seeing his owner do some work.”

“I was going to bring him,” said George, “but look what he did to me,” and he held up a bleeding finger. “That’s his answer to my invitation to come along.”

"Isn't he affectionate?" laughed John. "My, I wish I had a parrot."

"He'll be all right some day," said George seriously. "You see if he won't."

"I'm glad you're the trainer and not I, anyway," said John grimly.

Laughing and joking, bantering one another and full of spirits they soon came to their destination, and prepared to measure off the distances according to the code.

"Read what the code says first of all, Grant," exclaimed Fred. "That'll help us all to know just what we are to do."

"You ought to know it by heart now I should think," laughed Grant. "Still, I'll read it if you say so."

"Go ahead, Grant," urged John, and once more they listened to the words that meant so much to every one of them.

"Take a course due north one hundred feet from the southern extremity of shark rock, then east fifty feet and north by east thirty-three. Dig."

"Dig," cried George. "That's the important word. Dig! Dig! Dig!"

"Wait a minute, Pop," exclaimed Grant. "We've got to find the place where we are to dig first, you know."

"All right," said George eagerly. "Here's the compass."

"Lay it flat out on the rock," directed Grant. "We'll take our first observation."

The little instrument was placed on top of the great rock while the five gold seekers crowded around it eagerly. The delicate indicator fluttered excitedly for some moments, then its fluctuations gradually became less and less. At last it stopped entirely, the tiny needle pointing exactly north.

"There we are," exclaimed George. "Now if we go directly opposite to the way that needle is pointing we'll find the southern extremity of this rock."

"That's what we want," cried Grant. "You walk down there, Fred."

Fred hastened to obey and soon stationed himself at the opposite end of the rock, which happened to be the tail of the shark.

"Get in direct line now," directed Grant.

"You'll have to tell me what that is," replied Fred. "I can't tell the exact spot, you know, from looking at it."

"That's right," agreed John, "and we don't want to make any mistake at the very beginning of our calculations. That would throw us 'way off later on."

"Take this stick," suggested George, bringing up a long thin shoot he had torn from one of the nearby bushes. "Lay it flat out on the rock and

in a direct line with the needle. Be sure to get it exact and if we do we can easily enough find the 'southern extremity.' "

This was quickly done, and in a few moments the exact spot desired was located beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Now," exclaimed Grant, "the next thing to do is to measure off a distance due north from here."

"Here's your tape measure," laughed John, offering his shoe to Grant. "That's exactly ten inches long. I'll take my oath to that."

"Let's see," mused Grant. "We want to measure a hundred feet from here and the shoe is ten inches long. How are we going to figure that out?"

"That's easy enough," exclaimed John. "You do it this way: there are twelve inches in a foot, of course, and in one hundred feet there would be one hundred times twelve, or twelve hundred. Now the shoe is ten inches long, so you divide twelve hundred by ten, which is—"

"One hundred and twenty," said Grant quickly.

"Right," exclaimed John. "In other words, we want to measure a distance one hundred and twenty times the length of my shoe due north from here."

"Go ahead and do it," urged George. "I'll do it myself."

"You see to it that we keep going straight

north," advised Grant. "That is one of the most important things of all."

"That suits me," said George. "Start your measurements."

The course led off across the sandy beach towards a little clump of pine trees. Placing the toe of John's shoe close up against the spot on shark's rock that was their starting place, Grant began to measure. With a small stick he marked the place to which the heel of the shoe extended and then repeated the operation, using the marker for a starting-point. George kept close watch with his compass to see that the correct direction was being followed.

It was slow work and arduous. Everybody was on his hands and knees keeping careful watch of all the operations. The sun was hot and in some places sharp stones or bits of coral were mixed in with the sand so that more than one of the little party soon had bleeding knees and hands as a result. No one seemed to mind or even to notice these discomforts, however. The task they were engaged in was so interesting and absorbing to them that they paid scant attention to anything else.

"Be sure to keep track of the number of times we have measured, Fred," reminded Grant. "We don't want any slip-up, you know."

"Don't worry about that," said Fred confi-

dently. "Every time you shift that shoe I make a mark on this page from George's diary. When there are five marks made I cross them off."

"How many so far?" inquired John.

"Seventy," replied Fred after a rapid calculation. "Fifty more to go."

"Don't hurry," warned Grant. "We want it right, you know."

"We certainly do," agreed George. "We don't want to do all this work for nothing."

The measurements were continued, painfully and slowly. Every ten inches was marked off with the greatest of care, and if John's statement that his shoe was exactly ten inches long was correct it seemed impossible that any mistake had crept into their calculations. John insisted over and over again that the length quoted was absolutely correct, but his friends kept on asking him, so anxious were they to be perfectly sure.

"One hundred and twenty," announced Fred at length. "That's the end of the first journey."

"Thank goodness," exclaimed Grant, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "That's about as hard work as I care to do."

"I should say it is," agreed George. "Let's rest for a few minutes."

"I've got to," said Grant. "I'll never last otherwise."

"Mark the exact spot where we are to start on

the next lap," said John, "and then let's go up here in the shade and rest for a little while."

"Good idea," exclaimed Grant. "I'll put this stick in the ground."

The important spot plainly indicated, the whole party withdrew to the shade afforded by a neighboring clump of palms and stretched themselves upon the ground for a well earned rest.

"I don't suppose we have any business to be working out in that sun in the middle of the day anyway," said Grant. "It's entirely too hot."

"Do you think we're apt to get a sunstroke?" queried John.

"There's a good chance of it, I should think. I don't believe that people who are used to living in the tropics would be working out in it either."

"Suttinly dey wouldn't," said Sam with great conviction. "It am bery, bery dangerous."

"I think so too," exclaimed George. "I say we don't do anything more until the sun begins to go down a little. We've got more than half of it measured out anyway, and it won't take us so very long to do the rest."

"The only trouble is," remarked Fred, "that if we wait until then to finish the measuring we won't be able to do any digging to-day."

"What of it?" demanded Grant. "Gold won't

evaporate, you know, and if it's there to-day it'll be there just as much to-morrow."

"You're right, Grant," agreed George. "There's no hurry, and much as I want to see that gold, I'm willing to wait 'till to-morrow rather than run the risk of sunstroke or something."

Having reached this decision they lay about in the shade all through the tropical noon and discussed the treasure for the thousandth time since they first had come into possession of the code. Sometimes they dozed and Sam, true to the traditions of his race, slept soundly.

At last the shadows began to lengthen and a cool breeze sprang up off the water. It was like food to a starving man it was so refreshing and strengthening.

"We're off!" cried Grant, springing eagerly to his feet.

Every one joined him quickly and the task was resumed, and the air being cooler now, they all worked better and more easily.

"This next course is just half as long as the last one, isn't it?" said Grant.

"Yes," said John, "that makes just sixty times the length of my shoe."

Due east they measured off the distance and before very long had marked the completion of the second stage of their journey.

"Now," exclaimed Grant, "we go north by east thirty-three feet. How many lengths of your shoe is that, John?"

"You figure it out, Fred," urged John. "You've got pencil and paper and all you have to do, you know, is to multiply thirty-three by twelve and divide by ten."

"Thirty-nine and six-tenths times," announced Fred. "How can we measure that fraction exactly?"

"We won't need to," said Grant. "It's the last figure and we can get it within a couple of inches. We'll dig a hole a couple of feet square all around our last marker, so two or three inches won't make any difference."

"That's right," agreed Fred, and the measurements were continued.

Soon they came to the end, but there an unexpected complication presented itself. Thirty-three feet from the last point brought them squarely up against a palm tree some twelve or fifteen inches in diameter.

"That's the end," exclaimed Fred. "How can we dig down through a tree like that though? We must have made a mistake in our calculations."

"Why so?" demanded George.

"I don't see how it could be any other way," insisted Fred. "In the first place how can any one bury anything underneath a tree like that?"

“They didn’t,” said George. “They buried the treasure here and then planted this palm tree to mark the spot. Do you notice that it is the only one within fifty or a hundred feet of here?”

“You’re right, Pop,” exclaimed Grant. “I believe that that’s exactly what happened.”

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

AFTER a sleepless and restless night the excited little party of treasure seekers repaired once more to the palm tree which marked the spot so long sought by them.

"Got your knife, Sam?" exclaimed Grant. "Let's see how good a lumberman you are."

"Ah'll hab dat ol' tree down in no time," cried Sam confidently, and with his great heavy knife grasped firmly in his right hand he fiercely attacked the unsuspecting tree. The wood was soft and before long began to yield to Sam's blows.

"That'll just about finish up that knife," remarked Grant to Fred.

"Suppose it does," said Fred. "There's another hoop from that old cask up at the cave and he can easily make another."

"Isn't a barrel of gold worth more than an old iron knife anyway?" said John. "I should say so if you asked me."

"A barrel of gold wouldn't have done you much good when that shark was after you though," said

Grant grimly. "I guess just at that time Sam's old iron knife was worth more to you than anything in the world."

"That's true," acknowledged John soberly. "I have no right to talk against that knife."

"Come over here and give this tree a push," shouted George who was bustling importantly around Sam. "You fellows seem to think this is a party or something. Come over here and do some work."

No great amount of urging was required, however, and a moment later every one in the party was standing about the tree, pushing and pulling with all his might.

"She's beginning to give!" exclaimed George. "Keep it up!"

"Let Sam get to work for a minute or so more," suggested Grant. "About a dozen more good blows will finish the job."

"Dat's right," agreed Sam readily. "Lemme at dat ol' tree agin."

As though it was his mortal enemy Sam attacked the unsuspecting palm tree and dealt it such fierce blows that it soon required only a slight exercise of strength to topple it over.

"There she is," panted George when the tree lay prostrate. "She's down and now the only thing that stands between us and the treasure is a few feet or yards of sand."

"Let's hope it's feet," said John.

"And that there are no rocks to go through either," added Fred.

"You certainly can think of more hard luck than any one I ever saw, Fred," exclaimed George, pretending to be very much discouraged with his friend. "Why do you always look on the dark side of things?"

"I don't. I just believe in being sensible about it, that's all."

"It seems to me you're always looking for trouble."

"By the way," said John, "you didn't get those shark teeth, did you, Sam?"

"'Deed Ah didn't," exclaimed Sam, resting a moment from his exertions, for he had already commenced to dig. "Ah done clean forgot 'em."

"Will that bring us hard luck?"

"Not at all," said George. "Sam said that one would bring you good luck if you had it, but he didn't say it would be hard luck without it."

"I know that," said John, "but I thought that perhaps if you had a chance to get one and didn't do it you might give yourself bad luck."

"You're as bad as Fred," exclaimed George disgustedly. "Why can't you all be cheerful?"

"Why can't you all go to work is what I'd like to know?" exclaimed Grant. "It seems to me that that is more important than luck."

"You're right, Grant," said George readily. "There's no such thing as luck."

"There's such a thing as work, though," said Grant grimly. "Let's all do some of it."

They fell to work with a will and dug busily and steadily for a long time. A hole about four feet square was started and the boys were armed with almost everything one could think of in place of real tools. Sticks, flat pieces of rock, and hands almost more than anything else were employed.

"It's a good thing for us we are digging in sand and not in clay," remarked Fred after some time had elapsed.

"I should say it is!" agreed John. "As it is, we aren't making a great deal of headway it seems to me."

"Oh, yes, we are," exclaimed Grant. "The hole is at least a couple of feet deep already."

"I wish we could all get in there at once," said George. "We could work much faster then."

"Perhaps we won't have to go much deeper," said Grant hopefully.

"I think we shall though."

"Suppose we take turns down there with the knife," suggested Fred. "One of us can loosen up the sand with it and then a couple more can get in and throw it out."

"That's a good scheme," exclaimed John. "Give me the knife, Sam."

"Ah can do it mahself," protested Sam.

"No, you can't either," laughed John. "You've done enough work for to-day anyway. Let me have it now and perhaps you can take another turn at it later."

Reluctantly Sam gave up the knife and joined the others who stood and watched John down in the hole. When he had loosened a considerable amount of earth he climbed up and Fred and George took his place and threw the loose sand out of the pit. This operation was repeated many times with different ones doing the work. In this way the labor was lightened and the hole grew amazingly.

It was George's turn with the knife and he was working tremendously. He hacked and carved the sand, exerting himself to the utmost. All at once the knife struck something hard that had a metallic ring to it.

"You've got it, Pop!" cried Grant excitedly. "You've got it sure!"

"Hurry up and dig around it," exclaimed Fred. "Let me do it."

"I can do it all right," said George, and he fell to work with even more zeal than formerly.

Again and again his knife struck the metallic surface beneath him. His companions, grouped all around the pit, riveted their gaze on him and watched him with rapt attention. George dropped

the knife and dug the sand away with his hands, The black top of an iron chest presented itself to the view of the fascinated onlookers.

"Can you move it, Pop?" cried Grant.

"I can't find the edge of it."

"Ah get 'im," said Sam suddenly, and he dropped into the pit and began to work like a beaver. Their combined efforts soon cleared all the sand from the top of the chest, which appeared to be about eighteen inches square. On the top was a little handle with which to lift it.

"Lift it out, Sam!" cried John. "Lift it out!"

Sam exerted all his strength but could not budge the stocky little chest. It was either extremely heavy or stuck fast. Every one who was concerned in the matter was so interested in these operations that he was entirely unconscious of everything except what was going on in the pit right before their eyes.

"Dig it out a little more," advised Grant. "You can lift it then."

This proved to be true and a few moments later after a great pulling and tugging Sam succeeded in raising the heavy little chest from its place. Another great effort and he swung it up out of the pit where it was pounced upon by Fred, John and Grant. Sam and George followed almost instantly and an immediate inspection was made to see how it was to be opened.

"There's no lock on—" began Grant eagerly, when he was strangely interrupted.

"Ahoy, there!" came a shout and in amazement every one turned to see whence came the hail. Its bow just grating on the beach, was a small boat manned by four sailors; a half-mile off shore a large steamer was riding at anchor. So engrossed had all the boys been in digging the pit that they had not once noticed nor suspected its approach.

"Well," gasped John, "what do you think of that?"

"It means we get home all right anyway," exclaimed Fred. "Where do you suppose it came from?"

"I don't even care," said George. "How about the treasure, Grant?"

"The chest is empty," replied Grant gazing ruefully into the barren depths of the stout little iron box.

THE END

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